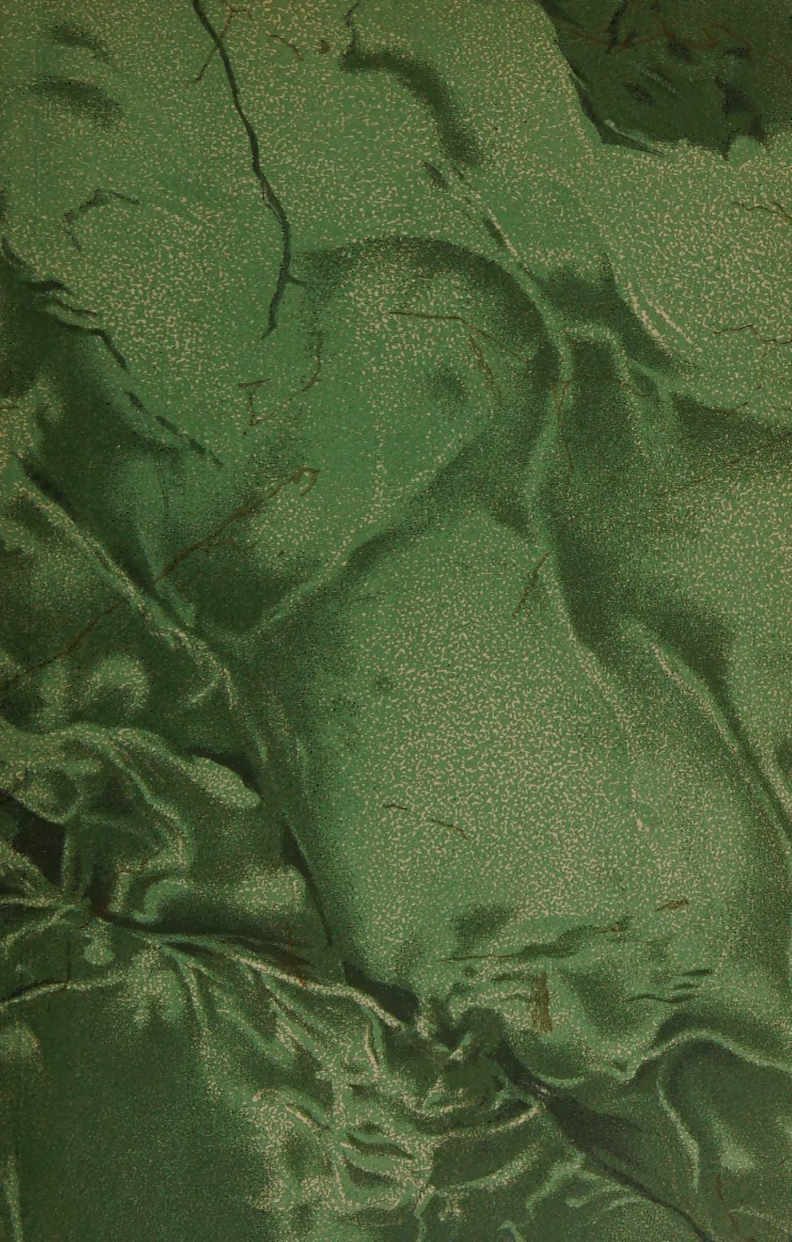










HE STOOD SEEMINGLY LIFELESS—LIKE A STATUE.

QUO VADIS."

A Story of the Time of Nero.

BY

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QUO VADIS.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

It was well-nigh midday when Petronius awoke, exceedingly wearied, as usual. He said himself that he felt benumbed in the morning, and had no power to collect his thoughts. But the morning bath and a careful kneading of the body done by the hands of skilful slaves gradually hastened the sluggish course of his blood, refreshed him, enlivened him, and restored his strength.

From the *olaotekia*, the last division of the bath, he came out invigorated, with eyes radiant with wit and joyousness, rejuvenated, blooming, and so unapproachable that Otho himself could not compare with him, and really worthy of his title of "*arbiter elegantiarum*."

The public baths he visited seldom, and only on such occasions when some public speaker happened to arrive who awakened admiration, and who was beginning to be talked of in the city, or when there were in the circus combats of exceptional interest.

He owned, on his own "*insula*," his private baths, which Severus Zeller had extended, re-built, and equipped with such uncommon taste that Nero himself acknowledged their excellence over the baths of Cæsar, although those of the emperor were more extensive, and surrounded with incomparably greater luxury.

After last night's feast, at which Petronius, getting tired of the jests of Vatinius with Nero, Lucan, and Seneca, took part in a discussion as to whether woman possesses a soul,—he, as we have said, awoke late as usual and took a bath. Two strong slaves laid him on a table of cyprus wood cov-

ered with snow-white Egyptian byssus, and, with their palms dipped in odorous oils, commenced to rub his well-shapen body. He, with closed eyes, waited till the heat of the laconicum, and the heat of their hands passed through his body, and expelled his numbness. After some time he began to speak, and, opening his eyes, inquired about the weather, and about the precious stones which the jeweler Idomeneus promised to send him for examination. It turned out that the weather, with soft breezes from the Alban hills, was beautiful, and that the gems had not been sent. Petronius, closing his eyes again, commanded to be carried to the tepidarium; but at the same time, from behind a curtain, a nomenclator thrust in his head, and announced that young Marcus Vinicius, who had lately returned from Asia Minor, had come to visit him.

Petronius ordered to admit the guest to the tepidarium, whither he was carried himself. Vinicius was the son of his eldest sister, who, many years ago, had been married to Marcus Vinicius, who served as consul in the time of Tiberius. The young Vinicius was fighting then with the Parthians, under the reign of Corbulus; and, after the termination of the war, returned to Rome. Petronius had for him a certain weakness; almost an affection, because Marcus was beautiful, a youth of athletic build, and, besides this, had the strength not to exceed a certain æsthetic measure in his profligacy, which virtue Petronius prized higher than anything.

"Be greeted, Petronius!" said the young man, entering the tepidarium with firm steps, "may all the gods be kind unto thee, and especially Asklepios and Kypriis, so that, under their double protection, nothing foolish happen with thee."

"Be welcome to Rome, and sweet be peace unto thee after war," replied Petronius, extending his hand from between the folds of soft karbas stuff in which he was wrapped. "What is to be heard in Armenia? and didst thou not, on passing Asia, stumble into Bythinia?"

Petronius had once been pro-consul in Bythinia, and, what is more, he had governed with vigor and justice. This appeared a strange contradiction in the character of a man given to effeminacy and love of luxury; he was, therefore, fond of mentioning those times, as they were a proof of what he had been, and of what he might have become had he wished it.

"I happened to visit Heraklea," replied Vinicius, "Corbulo sent me thither for reinforcements."

"Ah, Heraklea! I knew there a girl from Colchis; I would have given for her all the divorced women of this city, Poppæa included. But that was long since. Tell me rather what is to be heard from the Parthian boundary. To tell the truth, I am weary of all those Vologezes, Tiridates, and Tigranes,—of all those barbarians who, as young Arulenus maintains, still crawl on all fours at home, and only assume our human habits when they are among us. But at Rome they are now being much talked of,—maybe chiefly because it is not very safe to speak of anything else."

"That war is not successful, and, if it were not for Corbulo, might have terminated in a defeat."

"Corbulo! by Bacchus, he is a real little war-god, a real Mars, a great commander, and, at the same time, quick-tempered, upright, and dull. I love him,—be it only because Nero is afraid of him."

"Corbulo is no fool."

"Perhaps thou art right, but with regard to this it is all one. Dullness, as Pyrrho says, is by no means worse than wisdom, and differs from it essentially in nothing."

Vinicius commenced to relate about the war, but Petronius, having closed his eyes again, the young man looked at his tired and haggard face, changed the topic, and, with a certain interest, inquired about his health.

Petronius opened his eyes anew. How his health was?—nothing. He did not feel very well; but he did not impair his health as much as young Sissena, who had lost his senses to such a degree that when he was brought to the bath in the morning he inquired: "Am I sitting?" No, he does not feel well. Vinicius had just commanded him to the care of Asklepios and Kypris; but he, Petronius, does not believe in Asklepios,—it is not even known whose son that Asklepios was, the son of Arsinoe or Koronis; and if the mother was doubtful, what was to be said of his father?—who could say, in that time, that one's father was really his father?

Here Petronius commenced to laugh, and, after a while, added:

"Two years ago, it is true, I had sent to Epidaurus three dozens of live, well-fed chickens, and a golden gimlet; but do you know why? I said to myself whether it will help

or not, it will certainly do no harm. As people are still sending gifts to the gods, so I think that all judge as I do,—with the exception, perhaps, of mule drivers hired at the Porta Rica Capena by travelers. What concerns Asklepios, I had to do with some of the Asklepioses, when, a year ago, I had some trouble with my kidneys. They performed an incubation for me. I knew that they were tricksters, but said to myself: ‘What harm could it do me?’ All the world is based on swindling, and life itself is but a self-deceit; the soul is also but a fancy. It is only necessary to have sense enough to distinguish between agreeable things and disagreeable ones. I prefer to have my heating-apparatus made with cedar wood scattered o’er with ambergris, because I prefer good smells to bad ones. What concerns Kypriis, of whose protection you have so assured me, I am so acquainted with her protection that I have a sore finger in my right foot. As for the rest, she is a kind goddess! I foresee that thou, too, wilt, sooner or later, carry white doves to her altar.”

“Thou art right,” said Vinicius, “I have been shot at with the arrows of the Parthians, but those of Amor struck me, all unexpectedly, a few stadia from the city-gate.”

“By the knees of the Graces! thou wilt tell me about this at some leisure hour,” said Petronius.

“I have come to thee with the express intention of asking thine advice,” replied Vinicius.

The epilators, who then came in and busied themselves about Petronius, interrupted him. He threw aside his tunic and, at the request of Petronius, entered a bath of lukewarm water.

“Ah, I even don’t ask whether thou dost derive any advantage from the reciprocity of thy feeling,” said Petronius, looking at the youthful body of Vinicius which was as if cut out of marble. “Had Lysippos seen thee, he would employ thee as a model for a statue of Hercules in youthful strength, to embellish the gate leading to the Palatine.”

The young man smiled contentedly, and commenced to sink in the bath, splashing warm water in abundance on the mosaic representing Hera at the moment when she is imploring sleep to lull Zeus to rest. Petronius all the while looked at Vinicius with the pleased eye of an artist.

When Vinicius came out from the bath, and yielded himself in turn to the epilators, a lector entered, wearing on his breast a bronze tube containing rolls of papyrus.

"Dost wish to listen?" asked Petronius.

"If it is thy composition, with pleasure," replied Vinicius, "if this is not the case, I prefer to talk. Poets seize people nowadays at every street corner."

"That is true. One cannot pass a basilica, a bath, or a library, or a book-shop without stumbling on a poet gesticulating wildly like an ape. Agrippa, in coming here from the East, thought them possessed. Such are our times. Cæsar writes verses; hence all follow in his path. It is only forbidden to write better verses than Cæsar; for that reason I have some fear about Lucan. But I write prose, with which, however, I neither treat myself nor others. The lector should read codicilli of that unfortunate Fabricius Veiento."

"Why unfortunate?"

"Because he has been told to stay in the fields of Odyssey and not return to his domestic hearth before he receives a new command. That Odyssey, though, will be in one respect not so hard for him as for Ulysses, for his wife by no means resembles Penelope. I think it unnecessary to tell thee that he acted foolishly; but here all judge of matters superficially. Fabricius wrote a bad enough and tiresome book, which people commenced to read eagerly only when the author is exiled. Now one only hears on every side: 'Scandal! scandal! It may be that Fabricius has added something.' But I, who know the city well, our patres and women, assure thee that it is all more pallid than reality. This does not prevent every man from searching about in the book,—for himself with alarm, for acquaintances, with delight. At the book-store of Avirnus, a hundred copyists are transcribing the book at dictation, and its success is assured."

"Did not thine affairs slip into it?"

"They have; but the author is mistaken, because I am at once worse and less flat than he depicts me. Seest thou we here have long since lost the ability to distinguish between what is pleasing or displeasing, and to me it seems, in good sooth, that such a difference does not exist, although Seneca, Mausonius, and Trasca pretend that they see it. To me it is all the same. By Hercules, I speak from the heart. I have preserved that loftiness which does not mix up the ugly with the beautiful,—but, for example, our poet Bronzebeard, the charioteer, the singer, the actor, does not understand this."

"I am sorry, however, for Fabricius; he is a good companion."

"He was ruined by vanity. All suspected him; no one knew, certainly; nor could he keep silence, and told the secret all over in confidence. Hast heard his story of Rufinus?"

"No."

"Then come to the frigidarium; we shall cool ourselves there, and I will tell it to thee."

They went over to the frigidarium, in the middle of which stood a fountain emitting a bright, rose-colored, violet-scented stream. Seated in niches covered with thin velvet, they cooled themselves. Silence reigned for some time. Vinicius looked thoughtfully at a bronze fawn which, bending over the arms of a nymph, was seeking her lips eagerly with his lips.

"He is right; that is better than anything life affords."

"Yes, more or less. But thou, besides this, dost love war to which I am not inclined, because in tents one's finger-nails crack and lose their rose color. But every one has his weakness. The Bronzebeard loves song, especially his own; and old Scaurus his Corinthian vase, which he places at night by his bed, and which he kisses if he cannot fall asleep. He has already rubbed off the edge of that vase with his lips. Tell me, dost thou write no verses?"

"No; I never can compose a single hexameter."

"And dost thou not play on the lute, or sing?"

"No."

"And dost not drive a chariot?"

"I attempted it once at Antioch, but without success."

"Then I am at peace concerning thee. And to what party dost thou belong in the circus?"

"To the Greens."

"Now I am perfectly at peace concerning thee,—the more so, because thou hast great possessions, though not such great ones as Seneca or Lucan. For, seest thou, with us it is good now for one to write verses, to sing to a lute, to recite, and to fight in the circus; but better it is, and especially less dangerous, not to write verses, not to play, not to sing, and not to fight in the circus. Best of all it is to know how to become enthusiastic when all this is done by Bronzebeard. Thou art a good-looking young man and, consequently, it may happen that Poppæa should fall in love with thee. But she is in this respect somewhat danger-

ous. She had enough of love with her first two husbands, and for the third one she has quite different views. Dost thou know that that silly Otho still loves her to madness? He wanders about on the cliffs of Spain, and sighs; but he has lost his former habits to such a degree, and has so much ceased to care for his own person that, to dress his hair daily, three hours suffice him. Who could expect this, and especially from Otho?"

"I understand him," replied Vinicius, "but in his place I would have done something else."

"What, namely?"

"I should have selected faithful legions of mountaineers from that country. Good soldiers spring from that country."

"Vinicius, Vinicius! I am almost ready to tell that thou wouldst prove incapable of doing it, and dost thou know why? Because such things are done, and not mentioned, be it but conditionally. What concerns me, I should have laughed in his place at Poppæa, laughed at Bronzebeard, and formed legions for myself, not of Iberian men, but Iberian women. And, moreover, I would write epigrams, and would not show them to any one,—not like that poor Rufinus."

"Hast wished to tell me his history."

"I shall do it in the unctorium."

But in the unctorium the attention of Vinicius was arrested by beautiful female slaves, who were waiting for the bathers. Two of them, Africans, resembling noble statues of ebony, commenced to anoint their bodies with delicate Arabian perfumes; others, skilled hairdressers from Phrygia, held in their hands, which were soft and smooth like snakes, polished steel mirrors and combs; and two Grecian girls from Cos, who were beautiful as deities, waited, as Vestiplicæ, till the moment should come to put statuesque folds in the togas of the Patricians.

"Cloud-scattering Zeus, what a choice thou hast!" exclaimed Vinicius.

"I prefer quality to quantity," replied Petronius; "all my 'family'* at Rome does not exceed four hundred, and I think that for personal attendance, only upstarts need surround themselves with a greater number of slaves."

"More beautiful bodies even Bronzebeard does not possess," said Vinicius, distending his nostrils.

* Household servants.

Petronius replied with a certain friendly indifference: "Thou art my relative; and I am neither such a misanthrope as Barsus, nor such a pedant as Aulus Plautius."

But Vinicius, hearing the name of the latter, forgot the girls from Cos, and, raising his head, asked:

"Why art thou reminded of Aulus Plautius? Dost thou know, then, that after I had disjointed my arm outside the city, I spent more than two weeks in his house? Plautius happened to come up at the moment when the accident happened and, seeing me afflicted with intense pain, took me to his house, where a slave of his, the physician Merion, cured me. I wished to speak to thee especially about this very matter."

"What is the matter? Hast thou, perhaps, already fallen in love with Pomponia? In that case, I am sorry for thee; she is not young, and still virtuous. I cannot imagine a worse combination. Brr!"

"I have not fallen in love with Pomponia—ehéu," answered Vinicius.

"With whom then?"

"I should like to know it myself; but I do not even know her exact name: Lygia or Callina? At home she is called Lygia, because she comes from the Lygian nation; but she has her own barbarian name: Callina! What a strange house is that of Plautius! There are many people in it, but it is nevertheless quiet there as in the groves of Subiacum. During two weeks I did not even suspect that a deity was living near me. But once, about daybreak, I beheld her bathing in the garden-fountain, and I swear by the foam from which Aphrodite arose, that the rays of the dawn transfixed her body. It seemed to me that, as the sun rose, she would dissolve in his beams, as the twilight of the morning does. Since then I saw her twice, and since then I cannot rest; I know not what other desires are, I have no wish to know what Rome can give me; I want neither women, nor gold, nor Corinthian bronze, nor amber, nor pearls, nor wine, nor feasts,—I want only Lygia!—whole days and nights I am yearning for her."

"If she is a slave, buy her."

"She is not a slave."

"What is she, then? A freed woman of Plautius'?"

"She has never been a slave, and cannot, therefore, be a freed woman."

"Who is she, then?"

"I don't know; a king's daughter, or something of that sort."

"Thou dost awaken my curiosity, Vinicius."

"If thou wilt listen to me, I shall straight satisfy thy curiosity. It will not take long to tell the tale. Thou hast perhaps personally known Vannius, king of the Suevi, who, driven out of his own country, lived many years at Rome, and even became famous through his skill at dice-playing, and his good driving. Drusus placed him on the throne once more, and Vannius, who was really a strong, active man, ruled well in the beginning, and made war with success. But afterward, however, he began to rob, not only his own neighbors, but also his own Suevi. Thereupon, Vangio and Sido, two sisters' sons of his, and the sons of Vibilius, king of the Hermunduri, resolved to compel him to go to Rome once more to try his fortune with dice."

"I remember, that was not long ago, in the time of Claudius."

"Yes. War broke out. Vannius called to his assistance the Yagyzi; and his dear nephews resorted to the Lygians, who, hearing of the riches of Vannius, and lured by the hope of spoil, gathered in such numbers that Cæsar himself, Claudius, began to entertain fears about the safety of the boundary. Claudius, not wishing to interfere in a war with the barbarians, wrote to Atelius Hister, who commanded the legions of the Danube, to look with a watchful eye on the course of the war, and not to allow them to disturb our peace. Then Hister demanded of the Lygians they should bind themselves not to cross the boundary; and they not only agreed to this, but gave hostages, among whom were the wife and daughter of their leader. Thou knowest that barbarians take along their wives and daughters to war with them. Thus my Lygia is the daughter of that leader."

"Whence didst thou learn all this?"

"Aulus Plautius told it to me himself. The Lygians did not cross the boundary then; but barbarians come and vanish like a tempest. So did the Lygians disappear with their wild ox-horns on their heads. They killed Vannius' Suevi and Yagyzi; but their own king fell. After this, they disappeared with their spoils, leaving their hostages in Hister's hands. The mother died soon afterward, and Hister, not knowing what to do with the daughter, sent her to Pomponias, the governor of all Germany. The latter, at

the termination of the war with the Catti, returned to Rome,—where Claudius, as is known to thee, gave him permission to hold a triumph. The maiden walked on that day after the car of the victor, but after the solemnity,—since Pomponias did not know what to do with her definitely, and since hostages cannot be considered captives,—he gave her away at last to his sister Pomponia Græcina, the wife of Plautius. In that house where all,—commencing with the masters and ending with the poultry in the chicken-yard,—are virtuous, that girl, alas! grew up as virtuous as Pomponia herself, and so beautiful that even Poppæa herself would look in her presence like an autumn fig near an apple of the Hesperides.”

“Well then?”

“And I repeat to thee that from the moment when I saw the sun-rays passing through her body, I fell in love with her to distraction.”

“She is as transparent as a lamprey-eel, then, or a young sardine?”

“Jest not, Petronius; and if the frankness with which I speak of my passions awakens in thee some doubt, remember that glittering raiment often conceal deep wounds. I must also tell thee that, on returning from Asia, I passed one night at the temple of Mopsa to have a revelation; and Mopsa himself appeared to me in a dream, predicting that love would bring about a great change in my life.”

“I heard that Pliny does not believe in gods; but he believes in dreams, and, perhaps, he is right. My jests do not prevent me from thinking sometimes that there is, in reality, only one deity,—eternal, almighty, creative,—Venus Genitrix. She ties souls together, and unites bodies and things. Eros called forth light from chaos. Whether he did well or not, is a different question; but since it is so, we must recognize his might, though we have the freedom not to bless it.”

“Ah, Petronius, it is easier to philosophize than to give a good advice.”

“Tell me, what dost thou wish especially?”

“I want to possess Lygia. I wish that these hands of mine which now embrace only air might lock her in mine embrace, and press her to my bosom. I want to inhale her breath. If she were a slave, I would give Aulus for her a hundred slaves, with feet whitened with lime, as a sign that they were exhibited for sale for the first time. I want to

have her in my house till the time when my head shall be as white as the peaks of Socrate in winter."

"Although she is not a slave, she still belongs to the 'familia' of Plautius, and as a child deserted by her relatives, she may be considered an 'alumna.' Plautius, if he wished, might yield her to thee."

"I see that thou knowest not Pomponia Græcina. They at last became attached to her as if she were their own child."

"I know Pomponia,—a real cypress. If she were not the wife of Plautius, she might be engaged as a mourner. Since the time when Julius died, she has not thrown aside black robes, and looks as if she were walking among the dead. Therefore she is a 'one-man-wife,'—that is a phoenix among our women who have been divorced four or five times. By the way, hast thou heard that a real phoenix has been hatched out in Upper Egypt? Such an event happens only once in four or five centuries."

"Petronius, Petronius, we shall talk about the phoenix some other time."

"Listen to what I will tell thee, my dear Marcus, I am acquainted with Aulus Plautius who, though he finds fault with my mode of living, has for me some weakness, and, maybe, even respects me more than others; for he knows that I have never been an informer, like Domitius Afer, for instance, or Tigellinus, and a whole rabble of Ahenobarbus's intimates. Without having any pretensions to stoicism, I have, nevertheless, been offended more than once at such acts of Nero, at which Seneca and Burrus looked at through their fingers. If thou art of the opinion that I might do something for thee with Aulus, I am at thy command."

"I think thou canst. Thou hast influence and, besides, thy mind has inexhaustible resources. If thou couldst look deep into the matter and speak with Plautius"—

"Thou dost overestimate both mine influence and wit; but if that is the only question, I will talk to Plautius soon as they return to Rome."

"They had returned two days ago."

"In that case let us go to the triclinium where a meal is ready for us, and after we have refreshed ourselves we shall give command to carry us to Plautius."

"Thou hast ever been dear to me," exclaimed Vinicius, with vivacity, "and now it only remains for me to place thy

statue among my lares,—just such a beautiful one as this,—and place offerings before it.”

Saying this, he turned to the statues decorating one entire wall of the perfumed chamber, and pointed to a statue representing Petronius as Hermes with a staff in his hand. Then he added:

“By the light of Helios, if the ‘godlike’ Alexander resembled thee, I do not wonder at Helen.” And in that exclamation there was as much flattery as vanity; for Petronius, though older and not of such athletic build, had even a more beautiful appearance than Vinicius. The women of Rome not only admired his pliant mind and his taste, for which he was honored with the title “*Arbiter elegantiae*,” but also his body. This admiration was even visible on the faces of the two girls from Cos who were arranging the folds of his toga; and one of whom, whose name was Eunice, loved him in secret, and looked in his eyes with submission and rapture. But he, not paying any attention to her, smiled at Vinicius, and quoted in answer an expression of Seneca concerning women: “*Animal imprudens*, etc.,” and then, placing his hand on the shoulder of the young man, conducted him to the triclinium.

In the unctorium, the two Grecian maidens from Phrygia, and the two Ethiopians, began to collect the vessels containing the perfumes. But at that very moment, from beyond the curtain of the frigidarium, appeared the heads of the balneators, and a low “*Pst!*” was heard. At this call one of the Grecian girls, and the two Ethiopians quickly disappeared behind the curtain.

In the baths began a moment of license and merry-making, for which the inspector did not censure the slaves, as he himself had frequently taken part in similar orgies. Petronius suspected that they took place but, as a prudent man and one who did not like to dominate like a tyrant, looked at it through his fingers. In the unctorium only Eunice remained. For some time she listened to the voices and laughter which retreated in the direction of the laconicum, and then she took the stool inlaid with amber and ivory, on which Petronius had been sitting, and placed it carefully before his statue. The unctorium was filled with sunlight, and the reflection from the many-colored marbles with which the walls were faced. Eunice stood on the stool and, finding herself at the level of the statue, cast her arms suddenly around its neck. Then, throwing back her

golden hair and pressing her roseate body against the white marble, commenced, with ecstasy, to cover the cold lips of Petronius with kisses.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER the "morning meal," as Petronius called it, although the two friends sat down to it at an hour when the common mortals had long since risen from dinner, Petronius proposed a light nap. According to his opinion, it was somewhat too early to pay visits. There are, of course, people who begin to visit friends at sunrise, thinking that habit an old Roman one; but the most convenient time for paying visits is in the afternoon,—not before, though, the sun passes to the side of Jove's temple on the Capitol, and begins to throw slanting rays on the Forum. In autumn it is still hot, and people are glad to sleep after eating. At that time it is pleasant to hear the noise of the fountain in the atrium, and, after the obligatory thousand steps, to doze in the red light which filters in through the purple, half-drawn velarium.

Vinicius agreed with his opinion, and both began to walk speaking in a careless manner of what was to be heard on the Palatine and in the city, and philosophizing a little upon life. Then Petronius repaired to the sleeping-apartment, but could not sleep long. In half an hour he returned and, having given command to bring verbena, he commenced to inhale it, and to rub his hands and temples with it.

"Thou canst not imagine," said he, "how it enlivens and freshens one. Now I am ready."

The litter was waiting long since; hence they took their seats, and Petronius commanded to be borne to the Vicus Patricius, to the house of Aulus. Petronius's, "insula" was situated on the southern slope of the Palatine, near the so-called Carinæ; their nearest way, therefore, was below the Forum; but Petronius, wishing at the same time to call on the jeweler Idomeneus, gave command to bear them along the Vicus Apollinius and the Forum, in the direction of the Vicus Sceleratus, on the corner of which were many tabernæ of every kind.

The Africans lifted the litter and started on their way,

preceded by slaves called *pedisequi*,—that is “swift walkers.” Petronius, after sitting in silence for a short time, lifted to his nostrils his palm odorous with *verbena*, and seemed to be meditating on something. Then he said:

“It appears to me that, if thy wood-nymph is not a slave, then nothing prevents her from leaving the house of Plautius, and transferring herself to thine. Thou couldst surround her with love and cover her with riches, as I do my adored *Chrysothemis* with whom, speaking between us, I am quite sated, as she is with me.”

Marcus shook his head.

“Why not?” asked Petronius. “In the worst event, the case would reach *Cæsar*, and thou mayest be sure that, thanks to my influence, our *Bronzebeard* would be on my side.”

“Thou dost not know *Lygia*,” replied *Vinicius*.

“Then allow me to ask if thou knowest more about her than is possible to know from first sight? Didst thou speak to her? Hast confessed thy love to her?”

“I first saw her at the fountain, and afterward I met her twice. Remember that during my stay at the house of *Aulus*, I lived in a separate villa intended for guests; and with my disjointed arm I could not sit at the common table. Only on the eve of the day for which I announced my departure, I saw *Lygia* at supper, but could not say a word to her. I was obliged to listen to *Aulus* and his accounts of victories gained by him in *Britain*, and then of the fall of small states in *Italy*, which *Licinius Stolo* strove to prevent. On the whole, I don’t know if *Aulus* is able to speak of anything else, and do not think we shall escape this history, unless thou wilt be not indisposed to hear about the effeminacy of these days. They have pheasants in their chicken-yard, but they do not eat them, believing that every pheasant eaten brings near the end of Roman power. The second time I met her at the garden cistern with a freshly-plucked reed in her hand, the top of which she dipped in the water and sprinkled the *irises* growing around. Look at my knees. By the shield of *Hercules*! they did not tremble when clouds of *Parthians* advanced on our ranks with howls, but at that cistern they trembled. And, confused as a youth who still wears a ‘*bullæ*’ on his neck, I only begged pity with mine eyes, not daring to utter a word for a long time.”

Petronius looked at him as if with a certain envy

"Happy man!" he said, "however foolish the world and life may be, one thing in it shall remain forever beautiful—youth."

Then he asked:

"So thou hast not even talked to her?"

"Oh, no; when I had recovered somewhat I told her that I was returning from Asia, that I disjoined mine arm near the city, and was suffering greatly; but when the time for leaving that hospitable house arrived, I saw that to suffer in it was far sweeter than to be happy elsewhere, that to be sick there was far better than to be healthy elsewhere. She, too, listened to my words with confusion, bent down her head, and drew something with the reed on the saffron-colored sand. Afterward she raised her eyes, looked down once more at the marks she had already drawn, as if preparing to ask some question, then she fled on a sudden like a hamadryad before a foolish fawn."

"Her eyes must be beautiful."

"As the sea—and I was drowned in them as in a sea. Believe me, the archipelago is less blue. After a while a little son of Plautius' ran up with a question. But I did not understand what he wished."

"O Athene!" exclaimed Petronius, "remove from the eyes of this youth the bandage with which Eros has bound them; if not, he will break his head against the pillars of Venus' temple. Listen to me, thou spring-bud on the tree of life, thou first green shoot of vine," said he, turning to Vinicius, "I should think that instead of taking thee to the house of Plautius, I should take thee to the house of Gelocius where there is a school for youths inexperienced in life."

"I don't understand thee."

"And what did she draw on the sand? Was it not the name of Amor, or, perhaps, a heart pierced with his dart, or something of that sort from which one might learn that the satyrs had already whispered in the ears of that nymph various secrets of life? Can it be thou hast not looked at the marks?"

"Since I have put on the toga, a longer time has passed away than you think," replied Vinicius. "Before little Aulus ran up I carefully looked at those marks. I know that the maidens in Greece and Rome draw on the sand confessions which they do not wish to utter with their lips. But guess what she drew!"

"If it is no other than what I supposed, then I shall not guess."

"A fish."

"What?"

"I say—a fish. May not signify that cold blood is running in her veins?—I don't know. But thou who hast called me a spring-bud on the tree of life,—thou must certainly understand how better to explain the meaning of that mark?"

"Carissime! ask Pliny about it. He knows much about fish. Had the old Apicius been alive to-day, he too could tell thee something about fish; for in the course of his life, he ate more fish than could find place in the bay of Naples."

Here the conversation was interrupted. The slaves reached crowded streets where the noise of the people hindered their talk. From the Vicus Apollonius they turned to the Boarium; and then entered the Forum Romanum. The Forum, on clear days, before sunset, teemed with idle people who assembled to stroll among the columns, to tell and hear news, to look at the famous men carried past in litters, to look in at the jewelry-shops, at the book-shops, the money-changers, the silk-shops, bronze, and all other articles with which the buildings covering that part of the market opposite the Capitol were filled.

One-half of the Forum, immediately under the rock of the Capitol, was buried already in shade, but the columns of the temples, placed higher, were shed with the golden sunshine and the blue. Those standing lower cast lengthened shadows on marble slabs. The columns were seen all over in such numbers that the eye was lost in them as in a forest.

Those structures and columns seemed huddled together. They towered one above the other; they ran toward the right and the left; climbed toward the height, clung to the wall of the Capitol, or to each other, like greater and smaller, thicker and thinner, white or gold-colored tree-trunks, now blooming under architraves, flowers of the acanthus, now surrounded with Ionic corners, now finished with a simple Doric quadrangle. Above that forest gleamed colored triglyphs; from tympana stood forth the sculptured forms of gods, winged golden quadrigæ seemed ready to fly away from the summits through space into the blue dome, fixed serenely above that crowded place of temples. Through the middle of the market and along the

edges of it, flowed a stream of people; crowds passed under the arches of the basilica of Julius Cæsar; crowds were sitting on the steps of Castor and Pollux; or walking around the temple of Vesta,—resembling on that great marble background many-colored swarms of beetles and butterflies. From above, on immense steps, from the side of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, came new waves. At the rostra people listened to chance orators; here and there rose the shouts of hawksters, selling fruit, wine, or water, mixed with fig-juice; of tricksters; of venders of marvelous medicines; of soothsayers; of discoverers of hidden treasures; of interpreters of dreams. Here and there, in the tumult of conversations and cries, were mingled sounds of the Egyptian sistra, of the sambuké or of Grecian flute. Here and there, the sick, the pious, or the afflicted, were bearing offerings to the temples. In the midst of the people, on the stone flags, gathered flocks of doves, throwing themselves eagerly on the scattered grain, resembling many-colored and dark spots, now rising for a moment with a loud flapping of wings, now dropping down to places left vacant by people. From time to time, the crowds made way for litters in which were visible the faces of women, or the heads of senators and Patricians with rigid features and exhausted from living. The many-tongued population repeated their names aloud, with the addition of some term of praise or ridicule. Among the unordered groups, pushed from time to time, advanced with measured tread parties of soldiers, or watches, preserving order on the streets. Around about the Greek language was heard as often as the Latin.

Vinicius, who had not been in the city for a long time, looked not without a certain curiosity on the swarm of people, and on that Forum Romanum, which both dominated those crowds of all the world and was flooded by them; so that Petronius, who divined the thoughts of his companion, called it “the nest of the Quirites—without the Quirites.” The local element was actually lost in those crowds consisting of all races and nationalities. Among them were seen Ethiopians, gigantic light-haired people from the north, Britons, Gauls, Germans, sloping-eyed dwellers of Lericum; people from the Euphrates and from the Indus, with beards dyed brick-color, Syrians from the banks of the Orontes, with black and mild eyes; dwellers in the deserts of Arabia, dried up as a bone; Jews with flat breasts;

Egyptians with the eternal indifferent smile on their faces; Numidians and Africans; Greeks from Hellas, who equally with the Romans commanded the city, but commanded through science, art, wisdom and deceit; Greeks from the islands, from Asia Minor, from Egypt, from Italy, from Narbonic Gaul. In the throng of slaves with pierced ears there also was no lack of freemen,—idle people whom Cæsar amused, supported, even clothed,—and not a few free visitors mingled there, whom the ease of life, and the prospects of fortune enticed to the large city; nor were venal persons lacking there. There were also priests of Serapis, with branches of palm in their hands; priests of Isis, to whose altars more offerings were brought than to the temple of the Capitoline Jove; priests of Sybille, bearing in their hands golden ears of rice; and priests of nomad divinities; and dancers of the east with bright mitres on their heads; and dealers in amulets, and snake-charmers; and Chaldean magicians; and, finally, people without any occupation whatever, who applied for grain every week at the store-houses on the Tiber, who fought for lottery-tickets to the circus, who spent their nights in dilapidated houses of the districts beyond the Tiber, and sunny and warm days under covered porticoes, and in foul eating-houses of the Subura, on the Milvian bridge, or before the “*insulæ*” of the great, from which, from time to time the remnants from the tables of slaves were thrown out to them.

Petronius was well known to those crowds; and Vinicius continually heard the exclamation: “*Hic est!*” (Here he is!) They loved him for his munificence; and his popularity especially increased from the time when they learned that he had spoken before Cæsar in opposition to the sentence of death issued against the whole “*familia*,” that is, against all the slaves of the prefect Pedannius Secundus, without distinction of sex or age, because one of them had killed that monster in a moment of despair. Petronius repeated in public, it is true, that it was all one to him, and that he had spoken to Cæsar only privately, as the “*arbiter elegantiarum*,” because such a barbarous slaughter which befitted Scythians and not Romans, offended his æsthetic taste. Nevertheless, from that moment forth, people whose indignation that butchery aroused, loved Petronius. But he did not prize his popularity. Petronius still remembered that the crowd also loved Britannicus, whom Nero

poisoned; and Agrippina, killed at his command; and Octavia smothered in hot steam at the Pandataria, after her veins had been cut open previously; and Rubelius Plautius, who had been banished; and Thræsea to whom every morning might bring a death sentence.

At the book-shop of Avirnus he gave command to halt, and, descending from the litter, purchased an ornamented manuscript, which he gave to Vinicius.

"Here is a gift for thee," said he.

"Thanks!" answered Vinicius. Then, looking at the title, he inquired: "'Satyricon?' That is something new. Whose composition is it?"

"Mine. But I do not want to go in the road of Rufinus, whose history I was about to tell thee; nor of Fabricius Veiento; hence no one knows of it, and do thou mention it to no one."

"But thou hast said thou dost write no verses," Vinicius said, looking through the manuscript, "but here I see prose thickly interspersed with them."

"When thou art reading this, turn attention to Trimalchion's feast. As to verses, they have disgusted me since Nero had commenced to write an epic. Vitellius, when he wishes to relieve himself, uses ivory fingers to thrust down his throat, others use for this purpose flamingo feathers steeped in olive oil, or in a decoction of wild thyme; I read Nero's poetry, and the result is immediate. Straightway I am able to praise it, if not with a clear conscience, at least with a clear stomach."

When he had said this, he stopped the litter again before the shop of the goldsmith Idomeneus, and, having settled the affair of the gems, gave command to bear the litter directly to Aulus's mansion.

"On the road," he said, "I will tell thee the story of Rufinus, as proof of what vanity in an author may be." But before he had begun, they turned into the Vicus Patricius, and soon found themselves before the dwelling of Aulus. A young and muscular "Janitor" opened the door leading to the ostium; a magpie, confined in a cage over it, greeted them with a loud "Salve!"

On the way from the second ante-chamber, called the ostium, to the atrium itself, Vinicius said:

"Hast noticed that the door-keepers are without chains?"

"This is a strange house," replied Petronius, in an undertone. "It is surely known to thee that Pomponia Græcina

is suspected of belonging to that superstitious eastern sect, which adores a certain Chrestos. It seems that Crispinilla rendered her this service,—she also cannot forgive Pomponia because one husband has sufficed her for a lifetime. ‘A one-man woman!’ It is easier now to get in Rome, a half plate of fresh mushrooms from Noricum, than to find such women. She was tried before a domestic court.”

“According to thy opinion, this is a wonderful house.”

Meanwhile they had entered the atrium, and were soon announced. Petronius, who thought that eternal sadness reigned in this severe house in which he had never been, looked around with astonishment, and, as it were, with a feeling of disappointment, for the atrium was rather cheerful. A sheaf of bright light falling from above through a large opening, broke into a thousand sparks on a fountain in a quadrangular little basin, which was in the middle to receive rain falling through the opening during hot weather; around it grew anemones and lilies, and sapphire irises whose delicate leaves looked as if silvered from the spray of the fountain. Among the moist mosses in which lily pots were hidden, and among the bunches of lilies were little statues of bronze representing children and water-birds. In one corner, a bronze fawn, as if wishing to drink, was inclining its greenish head, grizzled, too, by dampness. The floor of the atrium was of mosaic; the walls, faced partly with red marble and partly with wood, on which were painted fish, birds, and griffins, attracted the eye with their variety of colors. From the door to the side chamber they were ornamented with tortoise shell, or even ivory; at the walls between the doors were statues of Aulus’ ancestors. Everywhere calm plenty was evident, remote from excess, but noble and self-trusting.

Although Petronius lived in greater elegance, he found nothing here to offend his taste, to which he called Vinicius’s attention. The velarius drew the curtain dividing the atrium from the tablinum, and from the depth of the hall Aulus Plautius could be seen rapidly approaching.

The man was in the eventide of life, grey-haired, but strong, and there was energy in his face, although it was too short, and eagle-like. But at this moment he was perplexed, even alarmed at the sudden arrival of the chum and confidant of Nero.

The worldly Petronius noticed it at once, and he therefore, tactfully and eloquently, declared to Aulus that he

had come to thank the host for the welcome given by him to the son of his sister; that he came solely to thank him, and that he presumed to do so only because of his old acquaintance with Aulus.

Aulus, on his part, assured Petronius of his welcome; and that he himself was very thankful, although Petronius could not guess the cause of his gratitude.

Petronius, raising his hazel eyes, vainly tried to recall a solitary service rendered by him to Aulus, or any one else, for that matter. He remembered none, unless it might be the act he intended to do now for Vinicius.

"I love and greatly value Vespasian," Aulus said, finally, "whose life thou hadst saved once, when he fell asleep while listening to a recitation of Nero's verses."

"Yes, he was fortunate, for he did not hear them," retorted Petronius, "but I admit that the matter might have ended with great misfortune to Vespasian. Cæsar insisted on sending a centurion to him with the friendly advice to open his veins."

"And thou, Petronius, didst laugh at him."

"That is true,—no, it is not true. I told him that in putting Vespasian to sleep, he triumphed over Orpheus, who could only put wild beasts to sleep. Ahenobarbus may be found fault with, provided one mixes the blame with a good deal of flattery. Our gracious Poppæa understands this very well."

"Alas! what times!" answered Aulus. "Two of my upper teeth have been knocked out by a Briton, wherefore my speech often turns into a hiss, but for all that, the happiest part of my life I spent in Britain."

"The bravest, thou dost mean," added Vinicius.

Petronius was alarmed. The old soldier might begin to recount his former battles, so he abruptly changed the conversation. They say that in the neighborhood of Præneste the farmers found a dead whelp with two heads, and that during the last storm, a lightning stroke demolished a part of the temple of Luna, although lightning was unheard of before at that time of the year. This was told him by one Cotta, who added that the priests of that temple are predicting the fall of Rome, or at least the ruin of a great house; and that the fall can only be averted by unusual sacrifices.

Aulus expressed the opinion that such signs must be taken seriously. That it is not surprising that the gods

are angered. The prevailing wickedness has passed all bounds; and that sacrificial offerings are due.

To which Petronius answered:

"Thy house, Plautius, is not very large, although a great man dwells in it; my house is too large for its insignificant inhabitant, but is also small. But if it is a question of the ruin of a house as great, for instance, as the '*domus transitoria*,' is it worth while to offer sacrifices in order to save it?"

Plautius did not answer the question. Such guardedness pained even Petronius, for notwithstanding his inability to distinguish between good and evil, he was not an informer, and could be relied on with confidence. He therefore again changed the conversation, and began to praise the taste displayed by Plautius in the arrangements of his dwelling:

"I have made no alterations in this nest," said Plautius, "since I inherited it."

The curtain which divided the atrium from the tablinum had been pushed aside, and the house was open through and through, so that through the following peristyle and the great pompous hall—the *œcus*—beyond, was seen the bright garden set, as it were, in a dark frame. The laughter of children reached the atrium from the garden.

"Oh, chief," said Petronius, "permit me to listen to the sincere laughter. It is such a rarity nowadays."

"With pleasure," said he, rising. "That is my little Aulus playing ball with Lygia. As to laughter, I think, Petronius, that our life is one continuous laugh."

"Life is so laughable," added Vinicius, "that is why people laugh; but this laughter of the children has a different sound."

"And thou, Petronius, laughest all night instead of all day," put in Vinicius.

They passed through the entire house, and found themselves in the garden where little Aulus and Lygia played ball with the aid of slaves—*spheristæ*. Petronius cast a hasty glance at Lygia; little Aulus ran to meet Vinicius, who bowed his head to Lygia. She blushed.

Pomponia Græcina sat in the triclinium of the garden, and the guests went to greet her. Petronius knew Pomponia, although this was his first visit to the house of Plautius; he had met her at Anistitia's, the daughter of Rubellius Plautus; at Seneca's, and at Polion's. He was some-

what surprised to see her sad though bright face. Pomponia somewhat unsettled his conception of woman. This man, spoiled to the very marrow of his bones, and possessing greater confidence in himself than any other man in Rome, began to feel a sort of respect for her. In thanking her for the care she had taken of Vinicius, he involuntarily used the word "*Domina*,"—a word which never entered his head when he spoke to Calvia Crispinilla, Scribonia, Veleria, Solina and other women of note. He was sorry, he said, not to meet her at the Circus or the Amphitheatre. Pomponia placed her hand in that of her husband, and calmly answered:

"We are both growing old, and prefer domestic quiet."

Petronius was on the point of saying something, when Aulus Plautius added in his hissing voice:

"And we feel ourselves estranged from people who have found Greek appellations even for our Roman divinities."

"The gods are now only rhetorical figures," carelessly said Petronius, "and rhetorics being a Greek art, even I find it easier to say *Hera* than *Juno*."

He looked deferentially toward Pomponia, and took issue with her on the subject of old age.

"It is true, people grow old quickly, but those lead a different sort of life. Besides, there are faces which *Saturn* seems to forget."

Petronius spoke the truth: though old, the face of Pomponia Græcina retained the freshness of youth.

Little Aulus in the meantime invited Vinicius to play ball. The boy was followed into the triclinium by Lygia. In the shade of the ivy, her face seemed to Petronius more beautiful than before. He thought she looked like a nymph. He had not spoken a word to her so far, but now bowed majestically, and instead of the customary greeting, quoted the words with which *Ulysses* greeted *Nausikaa*:

"If thou art a goddess, a sovereign of the boundless heavens, then only to *Artemia's*, the illustrious daughter of *Zeus*, can thy beauty and shapely form be compared. But if thou art mortal, and subject to the fate of the living, then ineffably blessed are thy father and mother, and blessed are thy brethren"—

The elegant kindness of Petronius pleased even Pomponia. As to Lygia, she listened, blushed to her ears, and inclined her head. But, little by little, a mischievous smile was forming on her lips,—timidity was struggling

with a desire to speak. She was finally emboldened, and suddenly casting her eyes on Petronius, she answered him in the words of Nausikaa, as if repeating a lesson:

"Stranger, thou seemest of distinguished birth; thou art wise, I see"—

She turned and ran away like a frightened bird.

It was now Petronius's turn to be astonished. He never expected to hear Homer's verses from the lips of the girl, of whose barbarous origin he had heard from Vinicius. He inquiringly looked at Pomponia, but she was mute. Old Aulus was the picture of pride.

His pride Aulus was unable to conceal. First, he had a parental feeling toward Lygia; and second, notwithstanding that the antiquated prejudices of Rome commanded him to spurn Greek, he considered it the language of learning. He himself never could learn it, which grieved him very much; and now he was glad that this man of letters, who considered Plantius's house as almost barbarian, was given an answer in the language of Homer.

"There is a teacher in our house, a Greek," said he, turning to Petronius. "He gives lessons to our boy, and the girl overhears them. She is a modest little bird, and we love her."

Looking through the branches into the garden, Petronius was watching three men playing ball. Vinicius, his toga thrown off, was striking the ball, which Lygia, at the other end, was prepared to catch. She, at first glance, made no great impression on Petronius; he thought her too slender. But after a closer inspection, at the triclinium, she appeared to him like the dawn and, as a good judge, he knew that there was in her something extraordinary. He noticed everything, and judged everything: her rosy, transparent face, her fresh lips, made, it seemed, for kisses, her sky-blue eyes, and alabaster forehead, her wealth of dark, long hair, reflecting a Corinthian bronze in its ripples, her snowy neck and "divine" contour of her face, breathing with the youth of May and budding flowers. He was an artist above all, and he thought that under a statue of that girl one might write "Spring." He suddenly thought of his Chrysothemis, and burst out laughing. With gold powder on her hair, and pencilled brows, Chrysothemis reminded him of a faded rose, from which the petals were falling. And yet all Rome envied him. Then Poppæa



"IT WAS HE," SAID LYGIA, AND SHE BOWED HER HEAD.

came to his mind; and she was only a waxen mask. In the Tanagrian features of that girl sparkled not only spring, but a psyche.

"Vinicius is right," thought he, "and my Chrysothemis is old,—old as Troy!"

He turned to Pomponia Græcina, and pointing to the garden, said:

"I understand now, domina, that with such children thy home is preferable to the Circus and the feasts of the Palatine."

"Yes," said she, looking in the direction of the garden where the children were playing.

The old leader began to tell the history of the girl, and what Atelius Hister had told him of the Lygian people who lived in the gloomy North.

The young people had finished playing ball, and were strolling in the garden, looking against the dark background of the myrtles and cypresses like three white statues. Lygia was leading little Aulus by the hand. They finally seated themselves near the fish-pond, in the middle of the garden. Aulus soon ran to frighten a little fish, and Vinicius continued the conversation he had begun during the walk.

"Yes," said he, in a low and trembling voice, "I had scarcely thrown off my pretexta, when I was sent to the legions in Asia. I knew not the city, nor life, nor love. True, I have learned by heart something from Anacreon and Horace, but I cannot quote, verses, like Petronius, when my mind is so paralyzed with admiration that I cannot find my own words. When a boy I went to Musonius's school, and he told me that happiness consists in desiring what the gods desire, and, consequently, depends on our will. And I think that there is another, greater, and better happiness, which is independent of our will; and that happiness only love can give. That happiness is sought for by the gods, and I, too, Lygia, am seeking her who would give me that love."

He was silent. Nothing but the splash of water, into which little Aulus was throwing pebbles, was heard. But Vinicius soon resumed in a voice still softer,—

"Thou knowest Titus, the son of Vespasian? They say that when scarcely out of his teens, he fell in love with Berenice, and that grief almost killed him. Lygia! I could love thee thus! Riches, glory, power are mere

vanity! The rich man will find one richer than himself; one that bathes in glory, will be overshadowed by another, more glorious than he; there is no man so strong, but there is a stronger one. But neither Cæsar nor the gods themselves can experience greater bliss, or be more happy than the poor mortal, who presses to his lips the lips of one he loves. In love the gods are no greater than mortals."

She listened with alarm, with wonder, and with a feeling akin to that awakened by the sounds of Grecian lutes or citharæ. At times it seemed to her that Vinicius was singing some strange song, which stirred her blood, and filled her heart with fear and an incomprehensible delight. His words seemed to express something which was in herself, and which she had not taken account of. She felt something obscure awakening within her, which was taking on a more and more beautiful form.

The sun had meantime passed the Tiber, and was now setting over the Janiculum. The motionless cypresses were overcast with the ruddy hue of the setting sun, and the whole atmosphere was pervaded with it. Lygia raised her blue eyes on Vinicius, as if waking from a dream. He bent over her, his eyes full of emotion, and in the reflection of the dying sun, he seemed to her more beautiful than all men, than all the gods, Greek and Roman, whose statues adorned the temples. He lightly placed his hand above the wrist of her arm, and asked:

"Canst thou not guess why I speak thus to thee?"

"No," she answered in a voice so low that Vinicius barely heard it.

But he did not believe her, and pressing her hand more vigorously, he was on the point of placing it on his heart and resume his fervent speech, when old Aulus appeared on the myrtle-lined path, and said:

"The sun is setting. Beware of the evening chill, and do not trifle with Libitina."

"I do not feel the cold," said Vinicius.

"Barely half of the sun's disk is seen from behind the mountains," said the old general. "This is not the mild climate of Sicily, where at sunset people gather at the market places and sing farewell songs to Phœbus."

And forgetting his own warning against Libitina, Plautius began to relate about Sicily, where he had his own villas and waving fields, which he loved with his whole heart. He often thought, he said, of going and spending there the

remainder of his days in peace. He had enough of hoar frost. The leaves have not fallen from the trees yet, the sky is still smiling above the city, but when the vine grows yellow, and the snow is falling on the Alban hills, and the gods send their piercing winds on the campania, he thought that he would remove then his entire household to a quiet, peaceful country-seat.

"Wouldst thou leave Rome, Plautius?" Vinicius asked with alarm.

"I have long been yearning for the country," he answered, "it is quieter there, and more safe." Again he told of the gardens, the herds, the houses hidden in green, and the beautiful hills, and the swarms of buzzing bees. But these bucolic notes affected Vinicius in a manner entirely different from that in which the old man was affected. It was the departure of Lygia that he saw in that picture, and he looked in the direction of Petronius as though from him alone could come salvation.

Petronius was sitting beside Pomponia, in a transport of delight over the beautiful effect of the setting sun, which threw upon the sky purple and violet hues. The black silhouettes of the cypresses stood out in clearer relief than during the day, and a universal calm overspread all.

Petronius was visibly affected by that calm. In the faces of Pomponia, the old Aulus, and their children there was something which was not to be seen in the faces of those who surrounded him all day, or rather all night,—there was a certain repose, a serenity emanating directly from their mode of life. It astonished Petronius that there were beauty and happiness which he, who was constantly seeking them, could not find. He could not conceal that thought, and turning to Pomponia, he said,—

"I am weighing in my soul the world in which you live and the world which is ruled by our Nero."

Pomponia raised her eyes to heaven, and said:

"God rules the world, and not Nero."

A moment of silence ensued. In the alley the footsteps of the old leader, Vinicius, Lygia and little Aulus were heard; but before they approached, Petronius asked her,—

"Thou believest, then, in the gods, Pomponia?"

"I believe in God, who is one, just, and all-powerful," answered the wife of Aulus Plautius.

CHAPTER III.

"SHE believes in God who is one, just, and all-powerful," repeated Petronius when he had left the house with Vinicius. "If God is all-powerful, then He has control over life and death; and if He is just, then He sends death justly. Why, then, does Pomponia mourn Julius? In doing so, she offends her God. This syllogism I must repeat to Bronzebeard, the monkey, because in dialectics I consider myself equal to Socrates. That woman has three or four souls, I agree, but none of them a reasoning one. Let Pomponia reason with Seneca and Cornutus over the question of their great Logos. Let the three call forth the shades of Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno, and Plato, who suffer in the Cimmerian regions like siskins in a cage. I meant to speak to her and Plautius about something entirely different. By the holy womb of the Egyptian Isis! If I had told him simply the reason of my coming their virtue would have echoed like the ring of a bronze shield struck with a stick. I simply did not dare! Believe me, Vinicius, I did not dare! Peacocks are beautiful birds, but what a noise they make! The noise frightened me. However, I must approve thy choice. A beautiful Aurora. And knowest thou what she reminds me of?—Spring! not our spring, but the spring which I saw once in Helvetia—young, fresh, bright green. By that pale moon, I am not surprised at thy love for her! But, know that thou lovest Diana, and that Aulus and Pomponia will be ready to tear thee limb from limb, as the dogs once tore Actæon."

Vinicius was silent. He lowered his head, and then spoke in tones, quivering with passion:

"I thirsted for her before, and now my thirst is unbearable. I must possess her. If I were Zeus, I would surround her with a cloud, as he surrounded Io, or would descend on her like a rain, as he descended on Danaë. I would press my lips against hers until she cried out in my embrace. I would kill Aulus and Pomponia, and carry her away. To-night I will order the flogging of one of my slaves, that I might listen to his moans"—

"Be calm," said Petronius. "Thou possessest the taste of a smith of the Subura."

"Thou must help me, Petronius. I will not consider her a slave; let her smear the fat of a wolf over my door, and sit as my wife at my hearth."

"But calm thyself, thou insane descendant of consuls! We do not drag the barbarians after our chariots in order to marry their daughters. First exhaust all resources, and in the meantime let us think over the matter. Chrysothemis I too accounted a daughter of Zeus, but yet did not marry her, just as Nero did not espouse Acte, although she was considered a daughter of King Attalus. Be quiet! If she should wish to leave Aulus, no one has the right to detain her. Know, by the way, that not alone thy heart is on fire, but Eros also is all aflame. I saw that, and I am a judge of these things. Have patience. Every ill has its remedy. I have already thought too much to-day; but to-morrow I will think again of thy love. Rely upon Petronius."

Both were silent. After a while, Vinicius, somewhat calmed, said:

"I thank thee. May fortune smile upon thee."

"Be patient."

"Whither art thou going?"

"To Chrysothemis."

"Happy man! Thou possessest the one thou lovest."

"I? Knowest thou what amuses me yet in Chrysothemis? It is that she makes love to my freedman, Theokles, and thinks that I do not see her. I once loved her, but now her falsehood and stupidity amuse me. Let us go together. If she attempt to turn thy head by writing messages to thee with her finger on the table, know that I shall not be jealous."

At the door of Chrysothemis's dwelling, Petronius placed his hand on the shoulder of Vinicius and said:

"Wait; I think that I have discovered a plan."

"The gods shall reward thee!"

"Yes, yes! an unfailing plan. Knowest what, Marcus?"

"I listen, my Athene."

"In a few days the divine Lygia will partake of Demeter's grain in thy house."

"Thou art greater than Cæsar!" Vinicius exclaimed with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER IV.

PETRONIUS fulfilled his word to Vinicius although he rested the next day until evening. He then sought Nero with whom he had a private conference, and as a result a centurion was despatched a few days afterward with a body of soldiers to the house of Aulus.

In those uncertain and changeful times these were more generally harbingers of evil than of good, and therefore, great was the consternation in the house when the guard of the atrium informed them that soldiers were without. The inmates all clustered around Aulus Plautius, conscious of some impending calamity, and as was natural, associating it with him. His wife, Pomponia, clung with embracing arms round his neck, her pale lips moving silently; Lygia tremblingly kissed his hands, while his little son clung to his knees. Slaves of all ranks hurried from their occupations and from their quarters with signs of lamentation and distress.

But the old soldier was self-possessed, as only those who for years have been face to face with death can become. His face took on a set expression as of marble, but he succeeded in restoring quiet and dismissing the slaves.

"I must go, Pomponia," he said at length. "If Cæsar requires my death, he will at least, permit us to take farewell."

He put her gently away.

"God grant we may die together, Aulus,"—

And she dropped on her knees in earnest prayer, that the partner of her life would be spared to her.

The general joined the centurion in the atrium.

"Greeting, general," said his old companion in arms, for Caius Hasta had been a follower of Aulus Plautius during his wars in Britain. "I bring also the greeting of Cæsar and his command." Saying which he produced tablets and the Imperial signet in proof of his message.

"Thanks be to Cæsar for his greeting; as for his command, I obey. Welcome! Hasta, deliver thy message."

"General," said Hasta, "it has come to the ears of Cæsar

that the daughter of the king of Lygia, who during the reign of Claudius gave her as an hostage to the Romans, is among thy household. My Imperial Master, desires his thanks to thee for thy many years of hospitality, but as the maiden is a hostage he bids me say she should no longer encumber thee but rest in the care of Cæsar and his senators. Wilt thou therefore deliver her to me?"

An old and experienced soldier like Aulus Plautius knew better than to betray by word or sign whatever emotion he might feel. Nevertheless, the slight contraction on his forehead which had often struck fear in the hearts of the Roman legions in Britain, caused Caius Hasta a momentary embarrassment.

But in face of the command of Cæsar, Plautius was powerless; he gazed at the signet and tablets, then turning to his old follower he said quietly,—

"Remain here, Hasta, until I bring thee the hostage."

With these words he passed through the house. Pomponia, Lygia, and the little Aulus tremblingly awaited him in the cecus.

"There is no danger from death, or distant banishment," said he. "Nevertheless, Cæsar's message is one to bring sorrow. It concerns thee, Lygia."

"Lygia!" echoed Pomponia, wonderingly.

"Yes," he replied, and addressing Lygia, continued, "Pomponia and I have brought thee up as our own daughter; we love thee as such, but thou art not really our own. Thou wast given by thy father and thy people as a hostage to Rome, and Cæsar is thy guardian. He has sent to take thee from us." He delivered himself quietly but his voice was strained and husky.

Lygia listened without taking in the meaning of the words. Pomponia paled, on grasping their meaning; and the slaves again began to gather in the corridors.

"We must obey Cæsar's command," continued Aulus.

Pomponia took the girl in her arms as if to shield her from such a fate.

"O, Aulus!" exclaimed she, "she were better dead!"

Lygia hid her face on Pomponia's breast sobbing "O mother! mother!"

Again that contraction darkened the face of Aulus, and he replied sadly:

"Had I but myself to consider I would never give her up in life. But I must think of thee and our boy. I will

haste to Cæsar and beseech him to revoke his order. He may not listen, but I will go"—and taking leave of Lygia, added:

"That day will ever be dear to us, Lygia, when thou didst enter our home."

He put his hand on her head in act of blessing. He tried to maintain his calmness, but when he saw her eyes full of tears and felt the kisses she impressed upon his hand, his voice trembled with emotion.

"Farewell, thou light of our home!"

He turned quickly away lest he should be betrayed into showing his feeling.

Pomponia accompanied Lygia to the cubiculum where she endeavored to cheer and comfort her with words that seemed scarcely to belong to such a house, for in the lararium near them Aulus still offered to his household gods.

This was their hour of tribulation. In a bygone time, Virginius had slain his daughter with his own hand to save her honor—Lucretia had died to redeem hers. In Cæsar's palace vice and pollution held perfect sway.

She reminded Lygia of that higher law under which *they* lived which forbade self-destruction, but allowed self-defence from shame and wickedness even at the cost of life or liberty. To remain pure in the midst of corruption is the greatest purity. Life passes like a summer's day, but beyond the grave is resurrection; there, Mercy is supreme and sorrow and pain give place to gladness and joy.

This led Pomponia to speak of more personal matters. She had many anxieties and sorrows. The eyes of Aulus were still blinded to the truth, nor was she allowed to present it to her son. The fear, that when this life is completed and the newer life begins, that the separation she so much dreaded might extend to eternity, troubled her, and she felt that even in heaven she must be unhappy. Whole nights through, had Pomponia passed in prayer, or in tears before God, beseeching his light for those she loved. But she would be patient, trusting that, even in this new trouble, a mightier and more merciful power than Cæsar's was guiding and directing all things.

She embraced Lygia more warmly, and Lygia slowly sinking on her knees, they remained thus in silence for some time. Then Lygia rose with face more composed.

"I am troubled for ye, my dear ones; but compliance is imperative; not to obey, fatal. But I give thee the promise,

that I will ever remember, in Cæsar's house, the words thou hast uttered."

Again she embraced her foster mother and together they went throughout the house, that Lygia might take farewell of all. From among the slaves, stepped a Lygian, conspicuous from his stature and muscular development. This man, Ursus, along with others of his race, had accompanied the mother of Lygia to the Roman camp.

Kneeling before them, he now begged permission of both to accompany Lygia.

"Grant, Lady, that I may accompany the maiden to Cæsar's house, to guard and serve her there."

"Thou belong'st to Lygia, not to us," replied Pomponia. "But how canst thou guard her, even if thou art permitted to enter the palace?"

"I know not how, Lady; but this, I know, that my hands can snap an iron bar as if it were a stick."

Just then Aulus approached, and when he heard of the request of Ursus he most readily approved of it, saying that they had no right to keep him, as he was Lygia's servant. Since Cæsar claimed her as a hostage she must be accompanied by her attendants, and, he added to Pomponia, that as many of the slaves as she approved of might be sent as such. The centurion could offer no objection.

Both Pomponia and Lygia were glad of this, for now Lygia would not be surrounded with strange attendants. An old woman, who long had tended her, was selected, together with two Cyprian, and two German maidens, to bathe her and braid her hair. These accompanied Ursus. All were Christians, and Pomponia could rely on their fidelity. She found some comfort, too, in thinking that some seeds of the true faith might be sown in Nero's household.

She remembered having heard of Acte, a former slave of Nero's, and of much consequence in the palace. She had never seen her at the meetings of the Christians, but knew that she had perused the letters written to them by Paul of Tarsus, and she had furthermore done them many a service. This Acte was different from the rest of Cæsar's household, delighting in good works though living in sadness. To her Pomponia wrote, placing Lygia in her care. Hasta promised to personally deliver this note and he raised no objection to Lygia's attendants, for she was a king's daughter, and he would have expected her to have a larger number.

He wished to hurry, however, for fear he might be accused of indifference in executing his orders.

And now they must part. Pomponia and Lygia wept anew and Aulus again gave his blessing. Lygia departed, escorted by the soldiers, whose centurion little Aulus defied in his own little way for taking his sister. And they passed to Cæsar's house. Aulus Plautius retired with Pomponia to the pinacotheca, having first ordered his litter to be in readiness.

"Harken, Pomponia, I am going to beseech Cæsar, I fear in vain, and I go also to Seneca though Nero listens not now to him. His ears are readier to harken to Sophonius, Tigellinus, Petronius or to Vatinius. It is likely that Nero knows naught of Lygia's people, and he has only commanded the delivery of Lygia in compliance with some request. It is not difficult to guess whose."

She glanced up at him.

"Dost thou mean Petronius?"

"I do."

After a short period he continued:

"Thou see'st the result of permitting entrance to those devoid of truth and honor. Vinicius and Petronius, whom he brought hither, have caused woe to Lygia, for they seek her for a mistress, not as a hostage. May that day be cursed!"

Impotent rage and grief choked his utterance and his severe efforts to restrain himself were shown in his tightened fists

"Until now I have honored our gods," he said, "but now, it seems, as if *they* ruled not the world, but a vicious, depraved wretch, whom men call Cæsar."

"Aulus," replied Pomponia, "in God's sight Nero is no more than a handful of earth."

Aulus paced the mosaic floor of the pinacotheca restlessly. His life had been full of great deeds, but, as yet, he had known little of Fortune's frowns—that was a new experience. He had become very fond of his foster-child, more so than he was conscious of, and the thought that she had passed out of his keeping was unbearable. Moreover, he held in contempt the power which humiliated him, but it was a power which he was powerless to withstand.

When he had, at length, regained his self-possession, he remarked:

"Petronius will not have procured the removal of Lygia

for Cæsar, for fear of the wrath of Poppæa, so he must want her for himself or Vinicius. But I will find out, this very day."

Soon he was being carried in his litter to the Palatine, while Pomponia tried to comfort the little Aulus, who still wept for his sister, and still uttered defiance against Cæsar.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Aulus sought admittance to Nero's presence he was told that Cæsar was occupied with Terpnos the lute-player, and that he was not accustomed to give audience to any but those he had summoned. It was now plain to Aulus that Cæsar did not wish to see him again.

When Seneca was informed of the question there was a mixture of bitterness in his laugh.

"There is but one service I can render thee, my noble Plautius," said he, "and that is that I hide from Cæsar the sorrow my heart feels for thee. Had Cæsar any suspicion of this it would be sufficient to cause him to retain Lygia."

Though Tigellinus, Vatinius, and Vitellius were not above bribery, Seneca did not consider it prudent to advise him to seek aid in that quarter. If they should tell Nero, being envious of Plautius's influence, that Lygia was very dear to him, Nero would be the less likely to give her up. Seneca could not conceal his feelings when he further added: "Cæsar has no love for those whose silence may be construed into a condemnation of his acts, and thou hast been silent too long. Why hast thou not followed the example of his other courtiers in lauding his virtues and overlooking his vices. He has taken thy silence as a condemnation of what others in their diplomacy have approved, such as the death of Britannicus and Octavia. Thou shouldst have seen goodness and virtue in these deeds of blood. Thou hast not sufficient foresight, Aulus, to command favor at court."

Refreshing himself with a draught from the fountain at the impluvium, he resumed,—

"But Nero is not void of gratitude. Thy long service to Rome, and the glory thy noble deeds have conferred upon

her, have endeared thee to him; his love for me is that of a pupil for his master. Behold, I drink this water, since I know it is not poisoned. Therefore I do not drink of wine, even in my own house. To enjoy the peace and quiet of old age we should school our desires, and be reasonably suspicious of others. My sickness is not of the flesh, but of the spirit, Plautius."

Seneca had found it impossible to follow the noble principles of Zeno, of Citium, while still believing in them. This weakness of soul that he betrayed, even to his countenancing of crimes that he felt he ought to condemn, troubled him more than aught else.

Here the old general interrupted his reflections.

"I know to what thou art indebted to Cæsar, my noble Annæus," said he, "but we will not speak of that now. I know Petronius to have caused Lygia's removal. Show me how I may reach him, and for friendship's sake plead with him in my favor."

"It would be a waste of time, my worthy Plautius, were I to seek to influence Petronius. He yields not to any man's persuasion. He knows no difference between good and evil. But let me show him that his action is vile, and he will be at once ashamed of it. When I meet him I shall address him in this fashion: 'Thy act, Petronius, is unworthy of a noble patrician.' If this does not incline him to be just, nothing else can."

The general thanked him, and then gave orders to be carried to the house of Vinicius. Aulus could not contain his wrath and indignation when he found Vinicius at sword practice with his trainer. He waited till the trainer had withdrawn, then heaped a torrent of abuse on the head of Vinicius to have found him thus occupied possibly at the very time the attack was being made on Lygia. But Vinicius's grief was great and altogether beyond his control when he heard of what had happened to Lygia. His grief was such that any suspicion Aulus might have had as to his complicity in the affair, was immediately dispelled. Perspiration stood in large drops on the young man's forehead; his face, a moment since pale, now burned with the anger that consumed him; his lip quivered with emotion, and a fierce light shone in his eyes. Rage and jealousy possessed him in turn. Aulus had hardly mentioned the name of Petronius when a strong suspicion of treachery took possession of him. Had Petronius played him false?

Let Petronius look to himself, then. The vengeance of Vinicius would make itself felt, even on Cæsar himself.

"Plautius," said he, "return to thy house and there wait my arrival. Neither Cæsar nor Petronius shall possess Lygia. I swear it, by the gods."

His voice was calmer but more resolute as he spoke these words.

No sooner had the general left than Vinicius, rushing from the atrium, hastened to the house of Petronius.

The words of Vinicius had given him some encouragement. He knew that if Cæsar, yielding to the persuasion of Petronius, had carried off Lygia in order to give her to Vinicius, that Vinicius would return her to their house. If otherwise, then vengeance would follow, and disgrace to Lygia be averted by death. He had faith in Vinicius, and would rather lose Lygia forever, with all his love for her, than that Cæsar should have her. He preferred death for her to dishonor. He would not have hesitated to kill her himself but that the thought of his little Aulus, the last of his race, kept him from committing this deed. A soldier, and in character somewhat of a stoic, death commended itself to his pride before disgrace.

He pacified Pomponia as best he could, and now they both eagerly awaited news from Vinicius. Every step heard in the atrium startled them, for they were filled alternately with hope and fear. The hours dragged slowly along, but still no news from Vinicius. At last, toward evening, a knock was heard on the outer gate. Soon after a slave entered with a letter for Aulus. He took it with a trembling hand, and hastily breaking the seal began to read. As he did so a cloud passed over his face. Turning to Pomponia he handed her the letter. She read aloud as follows :

"Marcus Vinicius to Aulus Plautius. What has happened, has happened by the will of Cæsar, before which incline your heads, as I and Petronius incline ours."

After reading this letter a long and painful silence fell on both.

CHAPTER VI.

PETRONIUS was at home. The doorkeeper dared not detain Vinicius, who broke into the atrium like a fury, and finding from information given him, that the master was in the library, fled hither. He found Petronius writing a letter. He knocked the reed from his hand, threw himself upon him, and buried his fingers in Petronius' shoulder, placed his face close to the latter's, and demanded hoarsely :

"What hast thou done with her? Where is she?" But here something unusual occurred. The apparently effeminate Petronius caught hold of both hands of Vinicius, and holding them in the iron grip of one of his own, said :

"I am weak only mornings, but in the evening my former strength returns. Try now to get away. Thou hast learned gymnastics from a weaver, and decorum from a smith."

He showed no anger ; but there was a slight reflection of courage and energy in his eyes. He shortly released Vinicius's hands, and the latter stood abashed, humiliated and mad.

"Thine is an iron hand," he said, finally, "but by all the infernal gods, if thou hast been treacherous, I will plunge a knife into thy throat even in the palace of Cæsar."

"Let us speak calmly," answered Petronius, "steel, as thou seest, is stronger than iron ; and though one of thy hands will make two of mine, I have no reason to fear thee. I am sorry for thy boorishness, and if human ingratitude surprised me, I should be surprised at thy ingratitude."

"Where is Lygia?"

"In a brothel,—in the house of Cæsar, I mean."

"Petronius!"

"Be quiet and sit down. Two things I asked of Cæsar : first, to take Lygia from Aulus ; and second, to give her to thee. Hast no knife in the folds of thy toga? Make no use of it now. I advise thee to wait a couple of days, because thou shouldst surely be sent to the dungeon, and who then will entertain Lygia in thy house."

Silence reigned. Vinicius surprisingly looked at Petronius, and said,—

"Do pardon me; I love her, and I cannot think rightly by reason of my love."

"Do I not surprise thee, Marcus? The other day I said to Cæsar: My nephew, Vinicius, is so madly in love with a slim girl, who is being brought up by Aulus, that his breathing turned his house into a vapor-bath. Neither thou, nor I, who know what true beauty is,—said I to Cæsar,—would give a thousand sesterces for the girl, but the boy was always as stupid as a calf, and is even worse now."

"Petronius!"

"If thou understand not that I meant it for Lygia's safety, then I am ready to believe that I spoke the truth. I made him understand that an æsthetic like he cannot find her pretty. Nero always looks with my eyes; will find her ugly, and will not want her. It was necessary to chain that monkey. Poppæa now will want Lygia, and will, no doubt, attempt to send her from the palace. And I carelessly kept telling the Bronzebeard: 'Take Lygia and give her to Vinicius. Thou hast the right to do it, because she is a hostage; besides, how that will pain Aulus!' As he had no reason for refusing, he gave his consent the readier because of the possibility of doing mischief to decent people. Thou wilt be made the official guardian of the hostage; into thy own hands will fall the Lygian treasure. Thou wilt have the opportunity of doing a double service, and not only wilt thou not lose by it, but wilt likely increase thy treasure. For the sake of decency only, Cæsar will retain her a few days in his palace, and will then send her to thy insula. Thou art a lucky man."

"Is it true? Is there no danger in her staying in Cæsar's house?"

"If she were to remain there a considerable time, Poppæa would see Locusta about her; but there is no danger for the next few days. There are ten thousand people in Cæsar's palace, and he may not see her at all. Moreover, the affair is in my hands, and but a few hours since the centurion reported to me that he had delivered her into the hands of Acte. Acte is a good soul, wherefore I entrusted Lygia to her. Pomponia Græcina is, apparently, of the same mind, for she wrote Acte herself. There will be a feast at Nero's to-morrow. I have arranged for a seat for thee beside Lygia's."

"Forgive me, Caius. I am so irritable;" said Vinicius,

"I thought thou hadst ordered her away for thyself, or for Cæsar."

"I can forgive thy irritability, but I cannot forgive the boorish movements of thy body, thy piercing cry, resembling that of a mora player. I do not like it, Marcus. Be henceforth more cautious. Know thou that Tigellinus is Cæsar's go-between; know, also, that if I loved Lygia, I would look into thy face and say: 'Vinicius! I take Lygia from thee, and I will keep her till I tire of her.'"

He fixed his hazel eyes on Vinicius with an expression of cold confidence. The young man was utterly confused.

"The fault is all mine," he said. "Thou art good and noble. I thank thee from the depth of my soul. Permit me but one more question: Why didst thou not send Lygia directly to me?"

"Because Cæsar wanted to maintain decency. All Rome will say that we are taking Lygia as a hostage, and while there is talk she will remain in Cæsar's palace. She can afterward be quietly sent to thy house, and there the matter will end. Bronzebeard is a faint-hearted cur. Although there is no limit to his power, he makes all his acts appear plausible. Hast thou cooled down enough to embark on a philosophical disquisition? I often asked myself why is it that every crime, be it as great as Cæsar's, and as certain of impunity, seeks the cover of the law, of justice, or of virtue? Why should it trouble itself? I am convinced that to kill one's brother, mother and wife would be more becoming to some Asiatic chief than to a Roman emperor. Had I found myself in such a situation, I should abstain from exculpatory letters to the Senate. But Nero writes and seeks justification, because he is a coward. But let us take Tiberius. He was no coward, yet he sought to justify his every act. Why, then? What is this involuntary tribute which evil places at the feet of virtue? Knowest thou what I think? It is done because vice is disgusting, and virtue is divine. *Ergo*, an æsthetic man is a virtuous man. *Ergo*, I am a virtuous man. I shall offer some wine on the altar to the shades of Protagoras, Prodicus, and Gorgias. Thou seest that sophists are not useless. Listen, for I have not finished. I took Lygia from Aulus that I might give her to thee. Very well. But Lysippus would make a marvelous group of you. You are both beautiful; *ergo*, my action is beautiful; and if my action is beautiful, it cannot be bad. Look, Marcus, before thee sits virtue in

the person of Caius Petronius! If Aristides were living, he would pay me a hundred minæ for this treatise on virtue."

But Vinicius, more occupied just now with realities, said:

"I shall see Lygia to-morrow, and shall see her every day for the rest of my life."

"Thou wilt possess Lygia, and I will have to reckon with Aulus. He will call upon all the infernal gods to avenge him. If that beast had only taken a few lessons in declamation! But, no; he will curse me as my porter cursed me before my clients, and for which I sent him to the country."

"I saw Aulus. I promised to send him news of Lygia."

"Tell him that the will of the 'divine' Cæsar is the supreme law; and that thy first son shall bear the name of Aulus. Give the old man some consolation. I have a mind to ask Bronzebeard to invite Aulus to the feast. Let him see thee at the triclinium alongside of Lygia."

"Pray, don't carry that out," said Vinicius. "I really pity them, especially Pomponia."

And he sat down to write the letter, which shattered the old leader's last hope.

CHAPTER VII.

ACTE, the whilom mistress of Nero, at one time received homage from the most important heads in Rome. But even then she never took part in public affairs; and when she, occasionally, did exert her influence over the young sovereign, it was only for the purpose of spoiling some one's pardon. Timid and tractable, she earned the gratitude of many, but made no enemies. Even Octavia could not get herself to hate her. She seemed of little consequence to those who sought power. Everybody knew that she still loved Nero with that sad and pensive love, which lives on hope and the recollection of the time when Nero was a good man, young, and loving. Everybody knew that she dwelt with these thoughts only. And as there was no danger of Cæsar ever returning to her, she was looked upon as a disarmed creature, and was not molested. Poppæa considered her a servant so meek that she did not mind her staying in the palace.

But as Cæsar loved her once, and parted from her in a

very friendly spirit, some customary civilities were accorded her. Parting from her, Cæsar gave her special apartments in the palace, and assigned her some servants. And since Pallas and Narcissus, as powerful ministers were given the most honored places at banquets, she was also from time to time invited to Cæsar's table. It may be that the true reason why she was invited was, that her beautiful figure was a desirable acquisition at the feasts. But then, Cæsar, in the choice of companions, had long before ceased to be strict. Among his guests were senators, but largely such as were willing to play the part of fools. There were patricians, young and old, who loved pleasure and luxury. Women there were, bearing great names, but who thought nothing of dressing their heads in yellow wigs which enabled them to seek adventures in unfrequented quarters of the city. Great statesmen, priests, who ridiculed their own gods, and alongside of them, singers, mimes, musicians, dancers; poets, who while declaiming, were thinking of sesterces that would be theirs for praising Cæsar; hungry philosophers. There were charioteers, jugglers, soothsayers—in short, everybody distinguished enough to be in vogue. Some adventurers wore long hair, with which they covered their ears pierced in sign of their low origin.

The more important guests sat at the tables, and the lesser were the objects of amusement. They would wait for the servants' permission to snatch something from the tables at the end of the feast. These latter were furnished by Tigellinus, Vatinius, and Vitellius who had to find them clothes, decent enough for Cæsar's palace. Cæsar rather liked similar company, among whom it was not necessary to restrain one's self. Luxury was in every corner of the palace. Great and small, descendants of great families and the rabble; great artists, insignificant scribblers, and the dregs of talent, elbowed each other in the great hall, eager to let their eyes feast on the unheard-of splendor, and to be near the source of all wealth and all honors.

Lygia, on that day, was to take part in a similar feast. Fear, uncertainty and stupefaction, quite natural in her transition from one position into another, struggled within her with the desire to resist. She feared Cæsar, the people, and the palace; the noise within deprived her of the capacity to reason; she feared the feasts with their shamelessness, of which Aulus and Pomponia Græcina spoke in her presence. She was a young girl, but in those days

these things reached the ears of the infants. She knew that in that palace perdition was awaiting her, for Pomponia had forewarned her. But Lygia's soul was pure, never tempted by evil, and acknowledging a lofty faith implanted in her by her foster mother, she swore by the Divine Teacher, whom she loved with all her childish heart, to defend herself against that ruin.

It was certain that neither Aulus nor Pomponia would now be responsible for her actions, and she thought of resisting and staying away from the feast. On the one hand, she was filled with fear; on the other, she was led on by a desire to show her courage, her firmness, her contempt for torture and death. Did not the Divine Teacher command to act thus? Was he not himself the example? Pomponia told her that the most devoted disciples of the new truth are only too eager to be tortured. And Lygia herself, when she was in the house of Aulus, experienced such a desire. She imagined herself a martyr, with wounds on her hands and feet, white as snow, and divinely beautiful, carried into space by white angels. The vision had an inexpressible attraction for her. A great deal of this was puerile, of course, but there was also self-adulation in her dream.

Now that she had the opportunity of experiencing all that she yearned for, fear mingled with curiosity seized her. How will she be punished? What tortures will be invented for her?

Childish Lygia hesitated, not knowing what to do, but Acte, noticing her instability, was greatly surprised. To resist the will of Cæsar? To deserve Cæsar's ire? She must be out of her mind. It appears by the words of Lygia herself that she is not a hostage, but a girl forgotten by her people. She is not protected by any law, and if she were, Cæsar is powerful enough to disregard it. It pleased Cæsar to take her, and from that moment she is in his power, which has no superior in the world.

"Yes," continued Acte, "I have read the epistles of Paul, and I know that in heaven there is God and the Son of God, who rose from the dead, but on earth there is but one Cæsar. Remember that, Lygia! I know also that your teachings require you to be stoics, and that when you are confronted by the necessity of choosing between shame and death, you must choose death. But canst thou tell that death awaits thee, and not shame? Hast thou not

heard of Sejanus's daughter? She was but a young child when Tiberius, not to discredit the law prohibiting the infliction of death punishment on maidens, caused her to be violated before her death. Do not anger Cæsar, Lygia! When the moment arrives for thee to choose between disgrace and death, thou wilt follow thy teachings, but do not court ruin. Do not irritate without sufficient cause the earthly but terrible god."

Acte spoke with compassion. Being shortsighted, she leaned over close to Lygia's face to make sure of the impression of her words on the girl:

With childish trustfulness Lygia embraced her and said: "How kind thou art, Acte."

Acte was touched by the praise and implicit faith of Lygia, pressed her to her bosom, and then answered:

"My joy and my happiness are gone, but I am not wicked."

She began pacing the floor, and continued in a low voice, in which there was a shade of despair:

"No, he was not wicked, either. He considered himself good, and wanted to be good. I know that better than anybody. All that came after—when he ceased to love. The others made him what he is—yes, and Poppæa."

Her eyes were moist. For a long time Lygia was observing her, and finally she asked:

"Dost thou pity him, Acte?"

"I do," answered the Grecian.

Lygia timidly continued:

"Dost thou still love him, Acte?"

"I love him."

And after a short pause, she added:

"No one loves him but me."

Silence ensued, during which Acte was endeavoring to quiet her heart, troubled by the recollections of the past. Her face finally assumed its customary expression of sorrow, and she said:

"Enough of myself, Lygia; let us speak of thee. Thou must not think of resisting the commands of Cæsar. It were insane to do so. But thou need not be troubled. I know well this house, and think that it is not Cæsar's presence that threatens thee, for he should not have caused thee to be brought to the Palatine if he had intended thee for himself. Poppæa reigns here, especially since she bore Cæsar a daughter. No, Nero ordered thee to come to the

feast, it is true, but he has not seen thee, nor asked about thee. It may be that he took thee from Aulus and Pomponia out of spite to them. Both Petronius and Pomponia wrote me to care for thee,—hence, there must have been an understanding. He may have done it at her request. If so, there is not the slightest danger; for Nero loves Petronius, and will not act counter to his wishes."

"Ah, Acte!" answered Lygia, "Petronius was present when I was taken away, and my mother was certain that Nero took me at the instigation of Petronius."

"That would be bad," said Acte, but after a moment's reflection, added: "Petronius may have casually remarked at some dinner that there was a Lygian hostage at Aulus's, and Nero, jealous of his power, may have demanded thee only because hostages belong to him. Besides, Nero dislikes Aulus and Pomponia. I think thou art mistaken. Petronius may not be better than the other people, but he looks different. Thou wilt probably find some protector besides Petronius. Hast thou made any acquaintance at Aulus's of some one near to Cæsar?"

"I know Vespasian and Titus."

"They are not in favor with Cæsar."

"And Seneca."

"Cæsar will act exactly contrary to his advice."

Lygia's face blushed.

"And Vinicius."

"I do not know him."

"He is related to Petronius. He lately returned from Armenia."

"Thinkst thou Nero will be glad to see him?"

"Vinicius is liked by everybody."

"And will he take thy part?"

"Yes."

Acte smiled tenderly, and said:

"Then thou shalt surely see him there. Thou must be there, first of all, because thou must. Thou art a child to think different. And second, if thou wish to return to Aulus, thou wilt have the opportunity of getting Petronius and Vinicius to intercede for thee, and obtain the right to return thee. Were they here they would tell thee the same thing, namely, that to resist is to perish. Go, Lygia! I can hear the noise of the people making preparations. The guests will soon be gathering."

"Thou art right," said Lygia, "I will do as thou sayest."

Lygia herself could not tell whether it was her desire to see Petronius and Vinicius that made her accept the advice, or the curiosity to see such a feast. But she understood that Acte was right; that she must go. The hidden temptation and reason both pointed the same way, and her hesitation ceased.

In the unctorium Acte anointed and dressed her. So much was Acte enthused with her beauty, that she herself dressed Lygia, although she had servants of her own. But it appeared that the teachings of Paul of Tarsus had not entirely obliterated her Hellenic spirit, of which the beauty of her body gave evidence. At the sight of Lygia's figure, created, it seemed almost of pearls and roses, Acte could not restrain an exclamation of surprise. She stepped back and looked on enthusiastically.

"Lygia!" she said at last, "thou art a hundred times more beautiful than Poppæa!"

But the girl, brought up in the house of Pomponia, where even in absence of men, a strict modesty was observed, stood like a statue of Praxiteles,—like a dream, but confused, blushing, and with her hands trying to hide her nakedness. Then she quickly drew the pins which held her hair, and with a shake of her head she loosened it, and it fell like a mantle on her body.

Acte approached, and touching her waving tresses, said:

"Oh, what hair thou hast! its waves are more beautifully golden than the powder, and I will not sprinkle any. How marvelous the Lygian country must be where such maidens are born."

"I do not remember my country," she answered. "Ursus told me that the country is one vast forest."

"And flowers grow among trees," Acte added, and dipping her hand in a vase filled with salicaria oil, she began to stroke Lygia's hair.

She next began to apply fragrant Arabian oils to Lygia's body, and dressed her in a gold-colored tunic, without sleeves, on top of which the snow-white peplus was to be put on. But as it was necessary first to comb her hair, Acte threw a so-called *synthesus* on Lygia's shoulders, and handed her over to the slaves, while she watched from a distance the combing. Two other women-slaves put her feet into white shoes, embroidered with purple, and laced them up to her alabaster ankles with gold tape. The peplus fell from Lygia's shoulders in elegant folds. Acte placed a

string of pearls around her neck, and began to dress herself.

When the first litters began to appear at the main entrance, Acte and Lygia went through the cryptoportico, from which were opened to their view the inner gallery and the court-yard surrounded by a colonnade of Numidian marble.

Under the lofty arch of the main entrance, over which Lysias's immense chariot seemed to bear Apollo and Diana into space, people passed into the palace. Lygia was struck with the luxury, of which in the modest house of Aulus she could not gather the slightest idea. The last rays of the setting sun were gilding the Numidian marble, which was gradually turning into purple. Past the marble columns, past the white statues of Danaides and others, representing gods and heroes, the crowd passed—men and women, like the statues, also dressed in togas, pepluses and robes falling toward the earth in soft folds. An immense Hercules, whose head was bathing in the sunlight, looked down upon the throng. Acte pointed out to Lygia the senators in togas embroidered with purple, in colored tunics and with crescents on their foot-wear; military men, artists, Roman ladies dressed in Roman and Greek fashion, in fantastic head-gear, some resembling towers, others pyramids covered with flowers. Many of these Acte called by name, often adding some short but terrible story, which surprised and frightened Lygia. It was a strange world to her, seductive to her eyes, but a world whose discord her childish mind could not understand. There was a great solemnity in that twilight, that row of columns; in those people resembling statues. It seemed that behind those massive marbles there lived demi-gods, happy and peaceful. But the quiet voice of Acte disclosed to Lygia ever new and terrible secrets of the palace and the people. In the distance was seen the cryptoportico, the columns and floor of which are even now covered with the bloodstains from the veins of Caligula, who fell under the knife of Cassius Chærea; there his wife was killed; there his child was dashed against the marble floor. In the dungeon under that marble slab, Drusus ate his own flesh from hunger. There Drusus the elder was poisoned; there lay once Gemellus terror-stricken; Claudius is there in convulsions; there was Germanicus,—all these walls echoed with moaning, and the death-rattle of the unfortunates; and these

people, now hurrying to the feast in jewels and expensive dresses, might find themselves there to-morrow, sentenced to death. How many of these visitors hide under a smile the dread of uncertainty? How many of these, with faces of demigods, are led there by a thirst for lucre or power? Lygia could no longer follow Acte in thought, for as this wondrous society attracted her staring eyes, her heart contracted from fear, and she felt an inexpressible longing for Pomponia Græcina.

Meanwhile, from the Vicus Apollinis the guests came in waves. From beyond the portico could be heard the voices of clients escorting their patrons. In the court-yard and the colonnades there appeared in bright array Cæsar's slaves, men and women; boys, pretorian soldiers, who were guarding the palace. Among the white and dark faces, here and there appeared in contrast the black visage of a Numidian, with feathers on his head, and gold rings in his ears. All sorts of instruments were brought in; lamps made of gold, silver, and brass. The conversation mingled with the splashing of the fountain, whose streams were falling on the marble and scattered in a fine spray.

Lygia looked on as if she were searching for some one. Suddenly a blush covered her face. From behind the columns came into view Petronius and Vinicius, as beautiful as gods. A heavy weight fell from her heart. She no longer felt so lonesome. Her longing for Pomponia and Aulus's house lost its painfulness. The desire to see Vinicius and talk with him deafened her to all other voices in her soul. All her recollections of the words of Acte and the warning of Pomponia were now overcome by the overwhelming desire to be at that feast, and to hear the voice that spoke to her of love and happiness, and which was still ringing in her ears. She was happy.

Lygia soon began to fear that happiness. She felt recreant to that pure teaching which had been instilled into her, and that she was false to Pomponia and to herself. It is one thing to go by compulsion, but to be glad of the necessity of going is quite a different thing. She felt guilty, unworthy, and ruined. She was in despair. She felt like crying. Were she alone, she would strike her breast, saying: "I am guilty! I am guilty!" Acte took her by the hand and led her into the inner chambers of the triclinium, where the feast was to take place. Lygia felt dazed, and breathed with difficulty. She saw the thousand lights,

flickering on the tables; heard the exchange of greetings as if through a haze. The noise deafened her; the odors intoxicated her; and she could hardly recognize Acte, who, after seating her at the table, took a seat by her side.

"I greet thee, most brilliant of stars! A greeting to thee, divine Callina!"

Lygia started, and turned around. Beside her sat Vinicius.

He was attired in a red tunic, togas being discarded on such occasions. His arms were bare, save for two gold bracelets above the elbow; below they were cleanly shaven. Those were the arms of a soldier, made for the sword and shield. A wreath of roses was on his head. His eyebrows met on the bridge of his nose; and with his splendid eyes and bronze complexion, he was the personification of youth and strength.

"I greet thee, Marcus."

And he continued:

"Happy my eyes that see thee, happy my ears that hear thy voice, to me more sweet than the sounds of flute or cymbal. Were I to choose between thee and Venus for company at this feast, I should prefer thee, my heavenly Lygia!"

Vinicius seemed to be devouring her with his eyes. He glanced first at her neck; then at her bare arms; admired her plastic form, embraced and fondled her; but he was burning not only with passion, but with ecstatic love—his happiness was beyond measure.

"I knew that I should meet thee at the house of Cæsar, but when I noticed thee, my whole soul was stirred with a feeling akin to unexpected happiness."

When Lygia recovered she felt that among the crowd of people in this house Vinicius was the only congenial creature. She spoke to him, inquiring about everything that she could not understand and which filled her with apprehension. How did he know that he would find her in Cæsar's house? Why did Cæsar carry her away from Pomponia? She would gladly return to her. It is so awful here! She would die here of distress and uneasiness, were it not that she hoped that Petronius and Vinicius will surely solicit Cæsar in her favor.

Vinicius explained that Aulus himself told him of her abduction, but did not know why she was there. Cæsar gives account to nobody of his doings or commands. But

for all that, she need not fear; he will not leave her here. He would sooner lose his eyes than not see her; he would sooner give up his life than abandon her. She is his soul, and he will guard her as he would his own soul. He will cause an altar to be erected in his house, and will worship her as his divinity; and he will make offerings of myrrh and aloes, and in spring,—snowdrops and apple-blossoms. And if she dreads the house of Cæsar, upon his word, he will take her thence.

Although he was tactful and often lied, yet there was the ring of truth in his voice, for his feelings were genuine. He was possessed of genuine pity for Lygia, and her words took root in his soul, so that when she began to offer thanks, and to assure him that Pomponia would grow fond of him for his goodness, while she herself would be ever grateful to him, Vinicius could not restrain his emotions, and it seemed to him that he would never be able to withstand her request. His heart began to melt, and her charms stirred his passions. He was thirsting for her, but at the same time he felt that she was very dear to him, and that he could worship her as a divinity; he felt an irresistible impulse to speak to her of her beauty, of his feelings, but the noise was growing, and he drew nearer to Lygia and he poured intoxicating sentiments into her ear.

And she became intoxicated with him. Among the strangers surrounding her, he seemed to her more and more the one devoted to her with his whole soul. He quieted her, promised to take her from the house by hook or crook, and to serve her for aye. Besides, at Aulus's he had made mention of the happiness she can give in general, but now he bluntly told her that his love was inexpressible; that there is no creature in the world as precious to him. Lygia never heard such words from the lips of man, and as she listened to him, there crept into her being a feeling of mingled happiness and fear. Her cheeks began to burn, her heart to beat, and she parted her lips in wonder. Though she feared these words, yet she would not miss one for the world. She now dropped her eyes, now raised them, and fixed her timid glance on Vinicius, pleading for more. The sound of music and voices, and the odor of Arabian perfumes dazed her. It was the custom in Rome to recline at table, and at home Lygia usually sat between Pomponia and the little Aulus, but here, by her side, was a young giant, fervently in love with her and infected with his

ardor, she experienced a feeling both of shame and delight. She felt a sweet impotence, a forgetfulness, and a drowsiness settled on her.

But the close proximity of Lygia had its effect on Vinicius; he turned pale and his nostrils distended like those of an Arab steed, and under his purple tunic his heart beat a tattoo; his breathing became heavy and he could hardly speak. It was the first time that he was so near to her. He could no longer collect his thoughts; his blood was fired and he tried to quench it with wine,—but all in vain. But it was not the wine—it was the marvelous face of Lygia, her bared arms, her beautiful chest heaving under a gold-bedecked tunic, her figure, hidden under the folds of the white peplus that intoxicated him. He finally drew her toward him, as he had done in Aulus's house, and began whispering in trembling accent,—

“I love thee, my heavenly” —

“Let me go, Marcus,” said Lygia.

His eyes became clouded.

“My goddess! Do love me!”

The voice of Acte, who was reclining on the other side of Lygia, here broke in:

“Cæsar is looking at us.”

Vinicius burst into anger against Cæsar and Acte. Her words broke the charm of his intoxication. Even a pleasant voice, at this moment, sounded repulsive. He thought that Acte purposely interrupted their conversation. So, glancing over the shoulder of Lygia at the intruder, he gave vent to his anger:

“The time has gone by, Acte, when thou didst sit by the side of Cæsar at banquets, and they say that thou art threatened with blindness; how then couldst thou see him?”

“And yet I see him,” she answered, sadly. “He, too, is shortsighted, but he is looking at you through an emerald.”

Every act of Nero, however trivial, caused everybody, even those nearest to him, to be on the alert. Vinicius was troubled, and stealthily looked at Cæsar. Lygia, who at first saw Cæsar as through a haze, and finally forgot him, now cast a curious glance in his direction. Acte spoke the truth. Cæsar, bending over the table, was looking at them through a polished emerald. For a moment his eye met Lygia's, and the girl's heart beat with terror. She recalled the story of the snakes that dwelt in the clefts of the

mountains, told her by an Egyptian slave in Aulus's Sicilian Villa, and she thought now that she saw the green eye of one of those serpents. She caught the hand of Vinicius like a frightened child, and into her head came crowding thoughts, swift and disorderly: "So, that is Nero, the terrible, the all-powerful?" She never saw him, and never imagined him as he appeared at the table. She imagined him as having a terrible face, an immovable malice in the features; but it was only a larger head, set on a short, thick neck, terrible, perhaps, but rather resembling from afar the head of a child. The tunic of amethyst color (prohibited to common mortals) threw a bluish shade on his broad and stubby face. His hair was dark, dressed in four curls—a fashion introduced by Otho. His beard he had lately sacrificed to Jupiter, for which he was thanked by entire Rome, although it was whispered that the reason for this fashion was to be found in the fact that Nero, like the rest of his family, grew a red beard. In his bulging forehead, however, there was something Olympian. In his contracted brows could be seen the confidence of power, but below that was the face of a monkey, a sot and a clown; a face of changing passions, flabby, though youthful, but sickly withal.

Presently Cæsar dropped his emerald and ceased looking at her. She then saw his large, blue eyes, blinking under an excess of light, glassy, and without a spark of thought, and resembling those of a dead man.

Nero turned toward Petronius and said:

"Is that the hostage with whom Vinicius is in love?"

"That is she."

"What are her people called?"

"The Lygians."

"Does Vinicius consider her beautiful?"

"Dress the trunk of a dead tree in the peplus of a woman, and Vinicius will consider her charming. But in thy face, O knowing judge, I can read the sentence! Thou needst not make it public. Yes, yes, a very skeleton, a poppy on a slender stalk; and thou, æsthete, divine, cherishest a stalk in a woman. Thou art right! Thrice thou art right! The face alone does not count. I have profited by thee much, but thy view I shall never acquire. And I am ready to wager against the mistress of Tullius Senecio that though all recline at the table, and it is difficult to judge

of the figure of the hostage, thou hast already decided that she is too narrow in the hips."

"Too narrow in the hips," said Nero, and closed his eyes.

A scarce noticeable smile crossed Petronius's lips, but Tullius Senecio who was then conversing with Vestinius, or rather ridiculing the significance of dreams, in which the latter believed, turned to Petronius, and though he had not the slightest notion of what they were talking, said:

"Thou art mistaken. I side with Cæsar."

"Very well," answered Petronius. "I have just been trying to prove that thou hast a spark of reason, but Cæsar claims that thou art an unalloyed ass."

"Habet!" said Nero, laughing, and turning down his thumb—a sign signifying, by the custom of the circus, that the gladiator had received a wound and was to be dispatched.

Vestinius, thinking that the conversation related to dreams, exclaimed:

"But I believe in dreams. And Seneca told me once that he, too, believed in them."

"I dreamed last night that I had become a vestal virgin," said Calvia Crispinilla, bending over the table.

This called forth the applause of Nero, which was caught up by the others. This clapping of hands did not easily subside, because Crispinilla, who had divorced a number of husbands, was known all over Rome as a rake.

But with the utmost unconcern, she continued:

"What of it? They are all old and ugly. Only Rubria resembles a human being, so there would have been two of us, although Rubria shows freckles in the summer."

"Beg pardon, purest Calvia;" said Petronius, "only in a dream couldst thou become a vestal."

"But if Cæsar so commanded?"

"Then only would I believe that dreams come true, although ever so unlikely."

"Dreams do come true," said Vestinius. "I understand people who do not believe in gods, but how can faith in dreams be discarded?"

"And as to predictions?" asked Nero. "It was predicted that Rome would merge into the Orient, and that I would reign over all."

"Predictions and dreams are somehow connected," said Vestinius. "A certain proconsul—a freethinker—once sent to the temple of Mopsus a slave with a sealed letter,

desiring to try the soothsaying ability of the little god. The slave slept in the temple over night, and in the morning reported that a young man, bright as the sun, appeared to him and told him but one word: 'The black one.' Upon hearing this the proconsul turned pale, and turning to his guests, who were also unbelievers, asked: 'Do you know what the letter contained?'

Vestinius halted, and raised a goblet full of wine to his lips.

"What did the letter contain?" asked Senecio.

"The letter contained the question: 'What bull do I intend to sacrifice: the black, or the white one?'"

But the interest roused by that story was interrupted by Vitellius, who had come to the feast a little tipsy, and who suddenly burst into inexplicable laughter.

"What makes that barrel of fat laugh?" asked Nero.

"Laughter distinguishes men from brutes," said Petronius, "and he has no other proof that he is not a boar."

Vitellius ceased laughing, and smacking his greasy lips, looked around with such surprise that one would think he had just noticed the surrounding crowd. Then he raised his hand, which looked like a pillow, and in a hoarse voice said:

"A military ring has fallen from my finger, and which belonged to my father."

"Who was a tailor," added Nero.

Vitellius again fairly roared with laughter, and began to search for his ring in the peplus of Calvia Crispinilla..

Vatinius cried out in imitation of a frightened woman, and Nigidia, a friend of Calvia,—a young widow, by the way, with the face of a child and the eyes of a prostitute—said in the hearing of everybody:

"He is seeking what he has not lost."

"And which will be of no use to him, whether he finds it or not," wound up Lucan the poet.

The feast grew merrier. Crowds of slaves were constantly bringing in new and various viands; from the large vases, filled with snow and wreathed with ivy, vessels of wine were produced. Everybody drank heartily. A shower of roses was falling from the ceiling upon the table and the feasting multitude.

Petronius supplicated Nero to increase the dignity of the feast by a song while the guests could yet appreciate it. A chorus of voices seconded him, but Nero would not listen to

it. The question was not one of courage, although he was not blessed with an abundance of that. The gods only know what efforts every public appearance cost him. He does not shrink from what he considers a duty to art. Besides, he would not neglect the gift of Apollo. He even understands that his duty to the state lies there, but his voice is not in trim to-night. He had placed leaden weights on his chest at night, but they were of no avail. He is contemplating a trip to Antium, to breathe the sea air.

Lucan besought him in the name of art and humanity. The world knew that the divine poet and singer had composed a hymn dedicated to Venus, compared with which the hymn of Lucretius was but as the hulation of a yearling wolf. The gracious ruler ought not to torture his subjects by his refusal. "Be not cruel, Cæsar!"

"Be not cruel!" exclaimed all those immediately surrounding the Emperor.

Nero made a sign of resignation. Then all faces lit up with an expression of gratitude; all eyes were directed at him. But Nero first ordered that Poppæa be called, and he explained to the visitors that ill-health had kept her from the feast; but as no medicine, save his singing, gave her relief, he would not like to deprive her of the possibility of her speedy recovery.

Poppæa soon came. While she still ruled Nero, who was her subject, she knew that in the matter involving his vanity as a singer, charioteer, or poet, he was dangerous to trifle with. She entered like a divinity, arrayed in brilliant robes, wearing a necklace of immense pearls, stolen from Massinissa—golden-haired, gentle Massinissa, who notwithstanding her two divorced husbands, looked like a virgin.

She was greeted as the "Divine Augusta." Lygia never saw such beauty, and she would not believe her own eyes, because she had heard that Poppæa Sabina was one of the most licentious women in the world. She knew from Pomponia that Poppæa caused Cæsar to murder his wife and mother; the guests and servants of Aulus had spoken to her about this woman; she had heard of her statues being torn down by the populace; had heard of the inscriptions, for which heavy penalties were imposed, but which were to be found on the city walls every morning. But now, at sight of this extolled Poppæa, whom Christians looked upon as the very incarnation of evil and crime, it seemed to

Lygia that only angels looked like her. She could not tear her eyes from Poppæa, and she involuntarily asked :

“ Ah, Marcus, can it be possible ? ”

Vinicius, somewhat vexed at having her attention engaged by so many things, said :

“ Yes, she is beautiful, but thou art a hundred times more beautiful. Thou dost not know thyself, or thou wouldst be in love with thyself, as Narcissus was. She bathes in asses’ milk, but thou wert bathed in Venus’s own milk. Thou knowest not thyself, *Ocelle mi !* Do not look at her ; look at me, *Ocelle mi !* Let thy lips touch this cup, and I will then touch it with mine.”

He drew his chair nearer to hers, but she was drawing hers nearer to Acte. But at this moment the guests were required to be silent, for Cæsar had risen. The singer Diodorus handed him a lute, otherwise known as a delta ; another, Terpnos, who was to accompany him, approached with his instrument, called the nablium. Nero rested the delta on the table, raised his eyes, and presently all was quiet in the triclinium.

Cæsar then began to sing, or rather to drawl rhythmically, his hymn to Venus, accompanied by two lutes. His voice, though somewhat dull, and his verses were not bad, so that poor Lygia was again conscience-stricken. The hymn, lauding the pagan Venus, seemed to her excellent—aye, even Cæsar himself, his head entwined in a laurel wreath, his eyes raised to heaven, magnificent, far less terrible and ugly than at the beginning of the feast, made a similar impression on her.

A thunderous applause burst forth. From all sides came exclamations : “ Oh, heavenly voice ! ” Some women, in token of their ecstasy, raised their hands, and stood thus, while others wiped the moisture from their eyes. It was as noisy in the hall as in a beehive. Poppæa raised Nero’s hand to her lips and silently held it there. At the feet of Nero fell the young Greek Pythagoras—a youth of remarkable beauty ; the same youth, to whom the half-insane Nero later commanded the Flamines to marry him.

Nero, always regardful of the praises of Petronius, steadily looked at him until the latter said :

“ As to the music, Orpheus must at this moment be green with envy, like Lucan, who is sitting there ; and as to the verses—I am sorry they were not worse, for I could then find words of praise for them.”

Lucan was not hurt at the mention of his envy; on the contrary, he looked at Petronius with gratefulness, and assuming a discontented look, he murmured:

"My fate be cursed! That I should live at a time when such an artist is on the earth! My chance of lingering in the memory of man and on Parnassus is gone! My light is but an oil-lamp in midday!"

Petronius, however, had a remarkable memory. He repeated some parts of the hymn, cited some verses, picked some beautiful words, and began to extol them to the sky. Lucan, as if forgetful of his envy, also added some words of enthusiasm. Nero's face reflected beatitude and immeasurable vanity, which is not only bounded by stupidity, but exactly equals it. He himself indicated verses which he thought best; and, finally, he began to cheer Lucan, telling him not to lose courage, for though man remains what he is born, yet the honoring of Jove does not exclude the honoring of other gods.

He rose to escort Poppæa, who was really ill, and wanted to get away. Caesar, however, ordered his guests to remain at their places, declaring that he would soon return. And in a moment he did, in fact, return—to stupefy himself with the fumes of the censer, which he himself, Petronius and Tigellinus had prepared for this sumptuous feast.

Some verses were read, and some dialogues were recited, in which enormity did service for wit. Then the celebrated mime, Paris, gave a representation of Io, the daughter of Inachus. The guests, and especially Lygia, unacquainted with such shows, were fascinated into believing it miraculous. Paris gave mimical expression to such things which, it seemed, could not be expressed in a dance. His hands moved with marvelous rapidity, reproducing, apparently, a light-bearing cloud, thrilling with lust, and embracing a swooning girl, who is burning in a paroxysm of bliss. It was an image, not a dance,—a bright image disclosing the secret of love, charming and shameless. Then came the Corybantes, followed by Syrian girls, and to the sounds of citharæ, lutes, drums, and cymbals, they plunged into a wild orgy of debauch. Lygia felt as if struck by lightning, and she hoped that a thunderbolt would strike the palace, and bury the feasters under the falling ceiling. But from the golden net fastened to the ceiling only roses fell, and the half-drunken Vinicius whispered:

"I saw thee at the fountain in the house of Aulus, and

loved thee from that moment. I see thee now, though thou art arrayed in peplus, as I saw thee then. Throw off thy peplus, as did Crispinilla. Thou dost understand. Men as well as gods seek love. Lay thy head on my breast, and close thy eyes."

Lygia's blood rushed to her temples. She felt herself falling into an abyss, and Vinicius, in whom but a moment before she had so much faith, was drawing her toward it; and she felt malevolent toward him. She again began to dread the feast, Vinicius and herself. And she thought she heard the voice of Pomponia ringing in her ears: "Save thyself, Lygia!" But something told her that it was too late; that one who had gone through all that she had experienced at that feast, was beyond salvation. She felt ill. At times she thought that she would faint. She knew that to rise from the table before Cæsar left his seat was to incur his dire displeasure; beside, she had not the strength.

The end of the feast was far off. New dishes were brought by the slaves; fresh wine was poured into the vessels. Athletes now began to wrestle. Their oil-covered bodies looked like one mass; the bones of one were cracking in the vicious grasp of the other, and a gnashing of teeth was distinctly heard. Now the trampling of their feet on the saffron-covered floor was heard; then again they were seen standing motionless, and then they appeared to the on-lookers like a marble group. The Romans eagerly watched this play of muscle. Croton, the gladiatorial light and teacher, sustained his reputation on this occasion, and brought the affair to an end: his adversary began breathing heavily, his face turned blue, blood came from his mouth, and he fell prostrate.

A storm of hand-clapping greeted the close of the combat, and Croton, resting his foot on the shoulder of the vanquished gladiator, crossed his arms on his chest and looked triumphantly around.

Then appeared other mimickers, jugglers and buffoons, but the spectators had drunk too deeply to give them attention. The feast had gradually turned into a drunken, loose orgy. The Syrian girls, who appeared in the bacchic dance, mingled with the guests. The music turned into a tempest of sounds; and as that interrupted conversation, the guests were calling for its cessation. The air which was laden with the perfume of roses and oil, with which

beautiful boys were sprinkling the feet of the guests, became stifling, the lights emitted a pale hue, the garlands of the heads of the guests lost their equilibrium, the faces were pale and covered with beads of perspiration.

Vitellius fell under the table. Nigidia, stripped to the waist, was resting her unsteady head on the breast of Lucan; and he, quite as drunk, was blowing the golden powder from her hair, while he raised his eyes in beatific attitude. Vestinius for the hundredth time repeated the answer to the proconsul's sealed letter; and Tullius, who reviled the gods, drawled out:

"For, if the spheres of Xenophanes be as round as thou wouldst make me believe it is, then such a god could be rolled with one's foot, like a barrel."

But Domitius Afer, the old rascal and informer, revolted at the conversation, and in his revolt poured a goblet of Falernian wine over his tunic. He had always believed in the gods. If some people say that Rome will perish, there are those who say that Rome has already perished. And, verily, if that should come to pass, it will be because our youth have lost their faith, and without faith there can be no virtue. In a similar manner the strict customs of olden times were neglected, and it does not occur to anybody that Epicureans cannot withstand the barbarians. But what is that to him! He only grieves that he had lived to such times, and that he must drown his woes in pleasures, since they would sooner or later kill him anyhow.

When he had said this, he embraced a Syrian dancer and showered toothless kisses on her neck and shoulder. Seeing which, consul Memmius Regulus raised his bald head, which was ornamented with a wreath resting on the right ear, and exclaimed:

"Who says that Rome is perishing? Nonsense! I, a consul, know better, and will enlighten you on the subject. *Videant consules!* Thirty legions stand guard over our *pax romana!*"

He placed his fingers to his temples, and shouted at the top of his voice:

"Thirty legions! Thirty legions, from Britain to the Parthian borders!"

But, suddenly, he stopped, and placing a finger to his forehead, added:

"And, perhaps, thirty-two."

But the thirty-two legions guarding the safety of Rome had no quieting effect on Domitius.

"No, no! Rome must perish, just as faith in the gods has perished, as were cast aside the time-honored customs! Rome must perish! But what a pity! Life is so sweet, Cæsar is so kind, and the wine is so good! Oh, what a pity!" And covering his face on the shoulder of the Syrian bacchante, he began to weep.

"Talk about a future life! Achilles was right,—better by far it is to be a day laborer on earth than reign supreme in a chimerical world. Meanwhile unbelief is destroying our youth."

Lucan had by this time removed all the gold powder from the head of the drunken Nigidia; he covered her and himself with ivy taken from a vase, and cast a contented and inquiring look around him. In a voice of deep conviction he kept repeating:

"I am not a man at all—I am a fawn."

Petronius was not drunk, but Nero, who had heretofore been guarding his "divine" voice, succumbed to the influence of the wine. He even attempted to repeat his verses,—this time in Greek,—but he remembered them no more, so he sang one of Anacreon's songs. Pythagoras, Diodorus, and Terpnos attempted to keep time, but ignominiously failed. Nero began to admire, as a judge, and an æsthete, the beauty of Pythagoras, and came near kissing his hands. Such charming hands he has seen before, but where?

Placing his hand on his perspiring forehead, he tried to remember. Suddenly he seemed to be seized with terror.

Ah, yes, the very hands of his mother Agrippina!

Dark visions crossed Cæsar's mind.

"Near Baïæ and Bauli she is said to have been seen wandering on the beach," he said, "and still walks and walks as if looking for some one. When she looks on a fisherman, he dies."

"Not a bad theme," said Petronius.

And Vestinius, stretching his neck like a crane, said mysteriously,—

"I do not believe in gods, but I believe in spirits."

But Nero paid no attention to them, and continued:

"But I celebrated the Lemuria; I don't wish to see her. This is the fifth year, mind you. I had to—had to punish her for hiring men to assassinate me. You would not have heard me sing to-night if I had not forestalled her."

"We thank thee, Caesar, in the name of the city, and the entire world!" shouted Domitius Afer.

"Bring more wine! let them strike the tympani!"

The tumult commenced anew. Lucan, covered with ivy, and desiring to be heard, rose and shouted,—

"I am not a man; I am a fawn and live in the woods! Eho-o-o-oo!"

Everybody was drunk. Cæsar was drunk; men and women were drunk. Vinicius was not lagging, and, besides his passions, he was possessed with a desire to embroil some one in a quarrel. This happened with him whenever he drank beyond his capacity. His face became more pale; he began to stutter. With an effort at command, he raised his voice and said,—

"Let me kiss thee! To-day, to-morrow—I care not when! Enough of this! Cæsar took thee from Aulus to give thee to me, dost understand? To-morrow night I will send for thee, dost understand? Cæsar promised me before he took thee. Thou must be mine! Kiss me, for I will not wait till to-morrow—and quickly."

He embraced her, but Acte came to her aid. She herself tried to repulse him, although she felt that her strength was giving way, that she was perishing. In vain she tried to loosen his hold; in vain she entreated him to have pity on her. His breath came nearer and nearer, his face was near hers. It was no more the kind, dear Vinicius, but a drunken, wicked satyr, repulsive and horrible.

But she was getting weaker and weaker. She could no longer push away his face to avoid his kisses. He raised her and, pressing her head against his breast, began kissing her lips.

At that moment some terrible power tore his hands from her neck with the ease of a giant, and hurled Vinicius aside. What had happened? Vinicius rubbed his eyes and saw before him the great figure of Ursus, the Lygian, whom he had seen in the house of Aulus.

The Lygian was composed, but looked at Vinicius in such a strange manner that the blood froze in the young man's veins. Then Ursus took his queen on his arms and with even stride walked out of the triclinium.

Acte immediately followed him.

When Vinicius recovered his senses, he jumped up and ran to the door.

"Lygia! Lygia!"

But passion, anger, astonishment and the wine held him fast. He staggered, caught the naked arm of one of the bacchantes, and asked :

“What has happened? What has happened?”

She handed him a goblet of wine, smiled, and said :
“Drink!”

Vinicius emptied the goblet and fell to the floor.

Most of the guests were under the table in most un-æsthetic positions. Some were wabbling about; others lay on their couches, and upon the aggregation of consuls and senators, drunken equestrians, poets, philosophers, and patriciennes, on this society, powerful but soulless, from the golden net attached to the ceiling a shower of roses was falling.

CHAPTER VIII.

URSUS was not molested; one of Cæsar's servants thought he was a slave carrying away his tipsy mistress. Besides, the presence of Acte precluded any suspicion.

Thus Ursus brought her safely into Acte's apartments.

Lygia hung like a corpse on the arms of Ursus; but when the fresh morning breeze swept over her face, she opened her eyes. In the open air it was growing clearer. From the colonnade Ursus passed through a gate leading into the imperial garden, where the tops of the pines and cypresses were purpled by the rays of the rising sun. The sounds of the feast were dying away. Lygia imagined that she had been snatched from the depths of hell, and carried into God's world. She suddenly burst into tears, and, hiding her face on the giant's shoulders, she repeated,—

“Let us go home, Ursus! home, to Aulus!”

“Very well,” answered Ursus.

When they reached the small atrium of Acte's apartments, Ursus seated Lygia on a marble bench, a little distance from the fountain. Acte tried to console her, and asked her to rest awhile, assuring her that there was no present danger, because the drunken guests would sleep till evening. But Lygia could not be consoled, and was restless. She placed her fists on her temples, and kept repeating childishly :

“Home, home—to Aulus!”

Ursus was prepared for anything that might happen. There were pretorians at the gates, it is true, but he would pass through. In the archway there were litters innumerable, waiting for the guests who will soon begin to disperse. They will walk out with the others, and no one will notice them. Besides, what business of his was that? He came there to do the bidding of the queen. He will do what she commands.

And Lygia kept on repeating :

"Yes, Ursus, let us go."

But Acte saw the folly of their intended departure. Yes, they may go; no one will keep them back. But it is not allowed to escape from the house of Cæsar with impunity, for, who does that, offends the majesty of Cæsar. They may go; but before the day has passed, a centurion, followed by a division of soldiers will carry a death sentence to Aulus and Pomponia; and Lygia will be brought back to the palace, to her final ruin. If Aulus should take her under his roof, his death would be unavoidable.

Lygia's arms dropped. There was no outlet. Either she or Aulus must perish. When going to the feast, she had hoped that Vinicius and Petronius would obtain from Cæsar her release, and hand her over to Pomponia; but now she knew that they were the very people, through whose influence Cæsar had taken her from Aulus. There was no escaping now. Only a miracle could save her, or God Almighty.

"Acte," she said, despairingly, "didst thou hear Vinicius say that Cæsar had given me to him, and that this evening he would send his slaves for me?"

"I did," she said, lowering her head, and was silent. The despair of Lygia found no echo in her breast. It must be remembered that she was once upon a time the mistress of Cæsar. Though good at heart, she could not understand the disgrace of such relations. Herself once a slave, she was accustomed to the life of a slave; besides which she still loved Nero. Were he to return to her, she would be the happiest creature in Rome. Clearly understanding that Lygia had no choice but either to become the mistress of Vinicius, or perish together with Aulus and Pomponia, she could not see why the girl should hesitate.

"There is no more danger for thee in the house of Cæsar, than there is in that of Vinicius," she said after awhile.

Although she spoke the truth, it never occurred to her

that she was practically saying: "Bow thy head to fate, and be the mistress of Vinicius." But Lygia had felt on her lips the burning kisses, full of beastly passion, and her blood rushed to her face at the recollection of it.

"Never!" she burst out. "I will not remain here, nor go to Vinicius!"

Acte was surprised at this flash of anger.

"Is it possible that Vinicius is so abhorrent to thee?" she asked.

But instead of answering, Lygia burst into tears. Acte pressed the girl to her bosom. Ursus sighed deeply, and nervously moved his large fists, for he loved his queen with the faithfulness of a dog, and could not bear the sight of her tears. In his Lygian heart there grew a desire to return to the hall, and choke Vinicius until he is blue in the face; and in case of necessity, choke Cæsar himself. But he would not confess this to his mistress, who might think such an act unbecoming a confessor of the Crucified Lamb.

Having calmed Lygia, Acte began questioning her again:

"Is he so hateful to thee?"

"No," she answered, "I must not hate him, because I am a Christian."

"I know that, Lygia. I know also from the letters of Paul of Tarsus, that it is not permitted to allow one's self to be dishonored, or to fear death more than sin; but tell me if thy teaching permits to cause the death of others?"

"No."

"Then how canst thou call Cæsar's vengeance on the head of Aulus?"

There was a moment of silence. The bottomless abyss again yawned before Lygia.

"I ask thee how, because I am sorry for thee, the good Pomponia, and their child. I have lived long enough in this house to know what the anger of Cæsar means. No, ye cannot flee from here without bringing dire results upon ye all. One way only is open to thee: to beg Vinicius to send thee to Pomponia."

But Lygia kneeled on the floor to implore some one else. Ursus followed her example, and both began to pray, in Cæsar's palace.

Acte for the first time saw such a prayer, and could not remove her eyes from Lygia, who, with outstretched hands and face turned heavenward, seemed to expect succor from there. There was an unearthly exulta-

tion in her eyes, open lips, and uplifted hands. And Acte understood why Lygia could not become the mistress of any man. A corner of the veil was drawn aside, and to the eyes of Cæsar's concubine was disclosed an unfamiliar world. Such a prayer in the house of Cæsar was entirely new to her. A moment before she thought Lygia was beyond any help, but now she began to believe that something unusual might happen; that some power greater than Cæsar's would send down a winged legion, or that the sun's rays would spread under her, and draw her up into space. She had heard of miracles among Christians, and was now ready to believe them to be true.

Finally, Lygia rose, her face full of hope. Ursus, too, rose, sat down on his heels, near the bench, waiting for her orders.

"God bless Pomponia and Aulus," said Lygia, her eyes filling with tears. "I must not bring danger upon them, and I shall never see them again." Then turning to the Lygian, she continued: "Ursus, I have no one but thee; thou must be my father and protector. I will not stay here, nor at Vinicius's. Take me from the city; hide me somewhere; I will follow thee beyond the sea, to the mountains, to the barbarians, where the Roman name was never heard. Save me, Ursus!"

The Lygian, in sign of obedience, knelt, and embraced her feet. But Acte, who had been expecting something miraculous to happen, was disappointed. Was that all her prayer brought? To flee from the house is to invoke the wrath of Cæsar; and if that could not reach her, he will surely avenge himself on Aulus. If she escaped from Vinicius's house, there would probably be an end of it, for Cæsar does not like to meddle with other people's affairs. At all events, there would be no affront to Cæsar.

But Lygia did not intend Aulus and Pomponia to know her whereabouts. She would escape, not from the house of Vinicius, but while on the way. His slaves would come to fetch her, he told her. It is evident now that either he himself, or he and Petronius, had obtained Cæsar's promise to give her to him. And if he should forget it to-day, he would send for her to-morrow. But Ursus will save her. He will take her from the litter and run away with her. No one is strong enough to resist Ursus, not even that terrible gladiator who wrestled at the triclinium yesterday. But Vinicius might send a large number of

slaves. Ursus must go at once to Bishop Linus for aid and advice. The bishop will have pity on her; he will not leave her in the hands of Vinicius, and will send some Christians to help Ursus escape with her.

The face of Lygia lit up with a smile. Hope came back to her, as if her calculations had turned to reality. She fell on Acte's neck, and whispered :

"Thou wilt not betray us, Acte, wilt thou?"

"I swear by the shade of my mother that I will not betray ye; but pray to thy God for the success of thy undertaking."

The blue, childish eyes of the giant lit up with happiness. His poor head could think of nothing to help the situation; but one thing he will do—he will go to the bishop who can read in the sky what can, and what cannot be done. As to gathering Christians, he could do that himself. He knows at least a thousand, and perhaps two: slaves, gladiators and free men—in the Subura, and beyond the bridges. He will repel the slaves of Vinicius, and carry away his queen. The Christians will follow her, even to the end of the world.

And he looked fixedly into space, as if trying to see the distant future.

"To the forest! Oh, what forests, what forests!"

And in a moment he shook off his vision.

Yes, he will go forthwith to the bishop, and in the evening he will return with, say a hundred men, and wait for the arrival of the chair. It matters not whether slaves or pretorians escort it. Let no one dare come within striking distance of his fist, be he even clad in iron. Is iron so strong? When he strikes the iron, the head underneath will not survive.

Lygia raised her finger with childish seriousness.

"Ursus, do not kill," she said.

The Lygian began rubbing his neck with his hand, which was like a club, and muttered in confusion. But he must save her—"his light." Had she not said herself that now his turn had come? He will do his best; but what if something happens in spite of his desire? He must rescue her, happen what may. And if it does happen, he will confess to the Innocent Lamb, will so repent, will so entreat him, that the Crucified Lamb will have pity on him, the poor fellow. He would rather not offend the lamb, but it is not his fault that his hand is so heavy.

His features softened. Not desiring to show it, he bowed and said :

“ I am going to the holy bishop.”

Acte embraced Lygia and wept. She was once more convinced that there was a world in which even in suffering there was more happiness than in all the pleasures and excesses of this palace. Again a door opened before her, whose threshold she was unworthy of crossing.

CHAPTER IX.

LYGIA'S sorrow was great at the loss of Pomponia Græcina, for she loved her with her whole soul, and her grief extended itself to the household of Aulus; but in time her despair became as a memory. She took delight in the thought that she was sacrificing herself for the Truth within her, and that this self-abnegation was taking her into an unknown and uncertain existence. There may have been something of simple curiosity as to what that life would resolve itself into, and whither it would take her, mingled with the higher aspirations of her soul. But she had a deep and abiding faith in what she considered to be the command of her Divine Master, and a simple trustfulness in His watchful care of her, without regarding it as a reward of her own obedience and faithfulness. With such a trust what harm could come to her? She was ready to endure sufferings for His sake. Even should death come, it cannot deprive her of Him; and when Pomponia dies, an eternity of bliss awaited their union. When in the house of Aulus she had often tortured her young mind that she, a Christian, was powerless to do aught to show her love for that Crucified, of whom she had heard Ursus speak with so much tenderness. At last the moment had come. This thought gave her much happiness, and she would often speak of it to Acte, though Acte did not understand her. To leave everything she loved most dear, all that was most beautiful and desirable in life, and for what? To escape from love itself. This was beyond Acte's comprehension. Sometimes she would think that Lygia was right, and that some mysterious but wonderful happiness communicated itself to her action, but of this she could give no satisfactory account to herself. Acte, being timid by nature, saw the possibility of an adventure

to Lygia that might have a fatal ending,—an adventure that might even cost her her life. But she did not mention her fears to Lygia, and as the warm sun poured into the atrium, she prevailed upon her to take the rest she so greatly needed after a night passed without sleep. Lygia offered no remonstrance, and together they went to the cubiculum, the spacious and luxurious furnishings of which attested Acte's former relations with Cæsar. Side by side they sought repose, but even Acte's weariness would not allow her to sleep. For a long time past she had been unhappy, and now to this unhappiness was added a certain uneasiness that had not troubled her before. Hitherto life had been merely sad to her, and without any promise of a brighter to-morrow, but now something that whispered of dishonor crept into her thoughts, and troubled her soul.

Confusing thoughts came into her mind. She caught occasional glimpses of light, but so fitful in its stay that it only served to bewilder her. She could see nothing clearly. From it she divined the presence of some unknown happiness, greater than any she had known before. It appealed to her in such a way that even Cæsar's love, should he care to set aside that of Poppæa, to bestow once more upon her, could hardly have satisfied this newly-awakened desire of her soul. She loved Cæsar, had made of him an idol in her heart, but at this moment he seemed to fall, in her estimation, to the level of his veriest slave and his magnificent palace, with all its sumptuous belongings, to dwindle to the proportions of a mere hovel. She wanted to sleep but the feelings engendered by this train of thought so tortured her that this was impossible.

Lygia, she thought, threatened as she was by so many dangers, must also be awake. She turned to her to discuss their plans and arrangements for her flight.

Lygia was sleeping peacefully. A few stray rays of light relieved the darkness of the cubiculum, and enabled her to see, through the slight parting of the curtain, her sleeping form. They played lovingly around her delicate features, lightly touched the closed eyelids, and stopped to kiss the parted lips. With her head resting on her bare arm, the gentle swelling of her bosom showed the regular breathing of one who sleeps without any disturbing thoughts.

"Ah," sighed Acte, "if I could only sleep so. Hers is the sleep of an innocent child."

Then the thought came to her mind, why did she flee

from the love of Vinicius; why did she rather choose abject want to dishonor, to be an outcast rather than reign as mistress of a noble house.

She gazed at the sleeper again, as if to read an answer in those undisturbed features. Noting their beauty, and the peaceful holy calm that rested there she involuntarily said to herself:

"Would I were like her!"

She looked upon Lygia as something divine, a being worthy of the love of the gods. Cæsar's palace revealed nothing more beautiful. Yet in this Greek woman's heart there was no place for envy. She had only pity for her in the presence of the many dangers that beset her path. She felt as a mother toward her. Stooping, she left a kiss on the waving tresses of her dark hair.

It was midday before Lygia awoke. As she did so she looked round in astonishment, unable at first to think of being elsewhere than in the house of Aulus.

Observing through the darkness the face of the Greek woman, "Is it thou, Acte?" she asked.

"It is I, Lygia."

"Can it be evening?"

"Midday has already passed, child."

"Where is Ursus?"

"Ursus did not promise to return; he was to watch in the evening for the litter, with a body of Christians."

"That is so."

From the cubiculum they went to the bath. After bathing Lygia Acte took her to breakfast. This finished they retired to the gardens of the palace, where, as it was yet too early for Cæsar and his courtiers to have risen, they felt themselves free from their obtrusion. This was the first time Lygia had seen those magnificent gardens, and their beauty dazzled and delighted her. Through the glistening foliage of olive trees, cypresses, pines, and myrtles, gleamed the untarnished white of marble statuary, reflected here and there in the clear waters of ponds, unruffled except by the passage of snow-white swans that glided majestically over their surface. The scent of roses perfumed the air; the spray from many fountains of curious design fell in the glancing sunlight in showers of gold or silver on their upturned petals; grottos, more charming than fairy abodes, revealed themselves at every turn, curiously festooned with ivy or woodbine; while among all wandered in stately gran-

deur the soft-eyed gazelle. The singing of many birds, of rich and variegated plumage, lent animation to the scene.

Except for the presence of some slaves who worked there, singing, as they worked, in a soft low voice, the gardens were empty. Some worked with spade, while others watered the flowers. Such as had been granted a momentary rest sought the cool shade of the groves, or strolled listlessly by the ponds, or stood so as to catch the refreshing spray from the constantly playing fountains.

They walked together in the garden a long time, looking at all the beautiful things to be seen there. Lygia, though far from feeling at rest, could not resist the pleasure and curiosity that all these things awakened in her. She thought, if Cæsar were only good how happy he could be amid such delights.

And now the two women, tired even of walking amid such lovely scenes, sat down on a bench beneath the shade of the cypresses to talk of those things which were nearest their hearts,—principally of Lygia's projected escape that evening. Acte was far more troubled than Lygia as to the success of their schemes. She saw innumerable difficulties that did not present themselves to the mind of Lygia. Her pity for her increased with her fears. Then it appeared to her as if the safer course would be to appeal to whatever of goodness Vinicius possessed. She asked of Lygia when their acquaintance began, and as to the possibility of Vinicius allowing himself to be persuaded to let her return to Pomponia.

"I have no such hope," replied Lygia, in evident sadness. "In Aulus's house it might have been otherwise. There he was kind to me. But the passion he now shows for me increases my fear of him. I had rather fly to the Lygians."

"But you loved him then, did you not?" asked Acte.

An inclination of the head was her only answer. "I was a slave," resumed Acte, as if talking to herself, "with thee it is different. A hostage, and the daughter of a king, as thou art, would make a wife of whom Vinicius might well be proud. Besides art thou not as the child of Aulus and Pomponia? Vinicius might ask thee to become his wife, Lygia."

Lygia's answer was calm, but full of sadness.

"I do not wish it, Acte," she said. "I would seek refuge with the Lygians first."

"Shouldst thou wish me, Lygia," said Acte, "I shall go

at this moment to Vinicius, awake him, should he be sleeping, and acquaint him of what I have said to thee. I shall speak to him thus, 'See, Vinicius, this is the daughter of a king, and no less beloved of the great Aulus, and the fair Pomponia. Lovest thou her? If so, I entreat thee return her to those who love her, then honorably ask for her hand in marriage.' "

Again Lygia's answer came, but this time more subdued, and with marked feeling in her tone.

"I prefer to flee to the Lygians, Acte." Tears flowed as she spoke these words.

At this moment approaching footsteps were heard. They were those of Poppæa Sabina, and the female slaves who accompanied her. They stopped before the bench occupied by Lygia and her companion. Two of these slaves held a bunch of ostrich feathers over her head as a protection from the sun, fanning her gently at the same time. An Egyptian woman, of ebony hue, whose ample breasts bespoke her calling, carried an infant in her arms, all swathed in purple with gold fringing. Both Acte and Lygia were desirous to avoid their attention, but Poppæa halted before the bench from which they had just risen.

"Acte," she said, "the doll's bells which you sent were badly fastened. This might have proved dangerous to the child had not Lilith seen to it."

"I crave thy pardon, divine Poppæa," said Acte, with crossed arms and a submissive inclination of the head.

"Who is this slave?" asked Poppæa, catching sight of Lygia.

"She is above that, divinity. She is the adopted child of Pomponia Græcina, and daughter of the Lygian king, and a hostage to Rome."

"Now visiting thee, Acte?"

"She has dwelt in the palace these two days past."

"Was she present at last night's feast?"

"Even so, Augusta."

"At the command"—

"Of Cæsar."

Lygia was now the object of the closest scrutiny from Poppæa. She met her somewhat stern glance timidly. Her beauty had suddenly inspired the favorite of Cæsar with jealousy. Poppæa easily took alarm at the sight of each beautiful face. Remembering the ruin she herself had

wrought upon Octavia, she feared the presence of a rival in the affections of Cæsar. She saw then with no small alarm the many charms of the beautiful girl who stood before her. Not a detail of her beautiful face and figure was lost to the critical eye of Poppæa. "Venus," she thought, "must have given birth to such a nymph as she." Poppæa felt herself to have grown instantly old at the sight of such beauty, and became seized with an envious dread. "Has Nero seen her," she thought, "and if so, how did her beauty affect him? To see her as she looks at this moment, how could he help loving her? Then she is not a slave, but a king's daughter,—no less a king because a barbarian. O ye gods! being so much younger, how if she is still more beautiful." She frowned more darkly, and a sinister gleam shot involuntarily from under her long lashes.

"Did Cæsar speak with thee?" she asked of Lygia.

"No, Augusta."

"Has the house of Aulus grown distasteful to thee?"

"I am not here from choice, lady. Cæsar, yielding to Petronius's persuasion, has taken me away from Pomponia. I had wished otherwise."

"Is it thy wish to return to Pomponia?"

The tone in which this was asked sent a sudden thrill of hope to Lygia's heart.

Holding out her hand to Poppæa, she said supplicatingly, "Lady, I am the promised slave of Vinicius; wilt thou not intercede with him for my return to Pomponia? To-day Vinicius is to send for me. I beseech thy goodness to save me from this threatened shame."

She seized the hem of Poppæa's flowing robe, and with trembling heart awaited her reply. A wicked smile played on the face of Poppæa as she answered:

"I promise thee that Vinicius shall this day enjoy his beautiful slave." Saying which she passed on a vision of loveliness showing the trail of the evil one.

Tears filled Lygia's eyes. Recovering her wonted composure she took her companion's hand, saying,—

"We will return. We must look elsewhere for help."

It was evening before they left the atrium. Fear had spread a palor over the features of both women which the light from the tapers brought in by slaves only served to heighten. They had almost lapsed into silence now, since both were listening to catch the sound of approaching foot-



DO YOU NOT REMEMBER, MASTER, WHEN I TOLD YOU
HOW I WAS MAIMED ?

steps. Lygia while grieved to leave Acte, recognized the necessity of instant action. No time must be lost, and even now Ursus must be awaiting her in the dark.

Collecting such jewels as she could and giving them to Lygia, Acte implored her to accept them as affording her a means of escape. Each interval of silence that fell upon their subdued conversation was filled with dread to their distraught imaginations. They listened with bated breath to every sound that fell upon their ears.

In the height of this tension they saw the curtain that hung over the entrance moved noiselessly back, and the figure of a man, tall, dark, and with face marked by small-pox, appeared before them. Lygia instantly recognized in this personage Atacinus, a freedman of Vinicius, whom she had seen at the house of Aulus.

A cry escaped from Acte's lips; while Atacinus, bending low, said,—

"Marcus Vinicius sends his greeting to fair Lygia, whose presence he desires to grace the feast he has prepared at his house in her honor."

Lygia's face had grown pale at this speech. Painfully parting her trembling lips, made answer, "I go."

Her arms around Acte's neck spoke the farewell she was unable to utter.

CHAPTER X.

As Atacinus had said, over all the house of Vinicius was to be seen the green of floral decoration. Over the walls and doors hung myrtle and ivy, and grape vines were twined about the columns. A woollen drapery of a purple color protected the atrium from the chilly night air. Now this was illuminated by beautiful lamps of many flames. These lamps were of alabaster, marble or Corinthian bronze, fashioned like birds, beasts, or vessels and containing cups filled with olive oil delicately perfumed. They were wrought by great artists, and were very beautiful, if not so wonderful as that famed candlestick which had graced Apollo's temple, and which was now used by the great Nero himself. The different colored shades of glass from Alexandria, or of transparent fabrics from the East gave the interior of the atrium a rainbow-tinted light. This oriental effect was

further heightened by the scent of nard which pervaded the whole house and to which Vinicius had accustomed himself in the East. Many slaves, both male and female passed to and fro in the interior of the house which also was brilliantly illuminated. A table was spread for the banquet in the triclinium, where, besides himself and Lygia, Petronius and Chrysothemis were to grace. Atacinus had been despatched with Cæsar's permission to fetch Lygia while Vinicius prepared to receive her in an honorable and friendly manner, for he had endeavored closely to follow the advice of Petronius.

"Yesterday, I saw thee, thou hadst drunk too freely," said he, "and didst behave like a boorish peasant. Insist not too strongly; thou shouldst know that one drinks good wine slowly, and that if 'tis sweet to desire, to be desired is sweeter."

But Chrysothemis dissented; and Petronius claiming that she was his vestal and dove, commenced to show how different must be the stripling, who for the first time sits on the quadriga, from the experienced charioteer in the circus; and continuing, he said to Vinicius,—

"Be generous, seek to make her happy and to gain her confidence. No shade of sadness should hang over a feast. Promise her, by all that is sacred, to restore her to Pomponia, and if after that, she to-morrow wish to leave thee, that will be thy concern;" and indicating Chrysothemis, he continued:

"That is the way I have dealt with this frightened bird for five years, and I cannot say she has been unkind to me."

Chrysothemis tapped him with her peacock fan, saying,—

"But I resisted thee not, satyr."

"When I thought on him whom I supplanted"—

"Thou knelt at my feet."

"Yes, and put rings on thy toes."

Unwittingly Chrysothemis glanced at the twinkling diamonds which decked the toes of either foot, and they both commenced laughing.

But the thoughts of Vinicius were otherwise occupied than with their jesting. He had robed himself in the dress of a Syrian priest to receive Lygia and his heart throbbed violently beneath its folds.

"They will have departed from the palace by now," said he, speaking half to himself.

"They must have done so," replied his friend, "and until

they arrive I will relate to thee the prophecy of Apollonius of Tyana, or give thee that history of Rufinius, which, though I cannot tell thee why, I have not yet finished."

But Apollonius of Tyana interested Vinicius as little as the history of Rufinius, for he was thinking of Lygia, and though feeling that it was more fitting that he should receive her at home, instead of fetching her like a lackey from the palace, he could not help wishing at times that he had followed his inclination, for then he should have seen her sooner and been near her in the litter in the dark.

During this time slaves were bringing in a tripod with rams' head ornaments, and dishes of bronze holding coals over which they sprinkled myrrh and nard.

"By this they will be going toward the Carinæ," mused Vinicius.

"He is impatient, and in his haste to meet them will probably miss them," exclaimed Chrysothemis.

But Vinicius only smiled absently, saying,—

"On the contrary, I shall wait."

But his dilated nostrils and panting breath drew the attention of Petronius, who, shrugging his shoulders, exclaimed,—

"He has not so much of the philosopher in him as is worth one sestertium, and son of Mars though he be, I shall never be able to make a man of him."

"Now they will be in the Carinæ."

They were, in truth, nearing there. In front were the slaves known as lampadarii, those known as pedisequi flanked the litter, while behind all, observing those in front came Atacinus. The procession moved slowly, for the streets were not lighted at all save by the lamps they carried. Near the palace the streets were deserted, only occasionally some man with a lantern passed, but the crowd increased further on until from almost every byway people poured out. All were enveloped in dark cloaks and were without lanterns. Some joined the procession advancing in the same direction while many more came from the opposite one. Sometimes the throng was so great that the lampadarii cried out:

"Make way for the noble Marcus Vinicius!"

As Lygia observed this throng through the parted curtains, she was carried away by conflicting emotions, one minute transported by hope and the next trembling with fear.

"There he is! There is Ursus with the Christians," said she at length faintly. "Now it must happen soon! O Christ help me! Save me, Christ!"

At first Atacinus had not noticed the unusual commotion in the street, but now saw something strange in all this and commenced to feel alarmed. Oftener and oftener was the cry raised by the slaves of the lampadarii,—“Make way for the noble tribune.” The crowd of unknown people increased, and pushed so to the sides of the litter, that at last Atacinus gave command to the slaves to drive them off with their clubs.

On a sudden, the lights were extinguished, and from the front of the procession came a cry, while a mad rush and struggle took place around the litter. Now, Atacinus was thoroughly alarmed, for he saw that undoubtedly this was an attack. But by whom? Such attacks were not unfrequently made by Cæsar and his attendants in different parts of the city, for the sake of amusement. That he, Cæsar, did not always come out scathless of these frays was well known to all; but it was equally certain that he, who defended himself, even if a senator, did so at the cost of his life. Not far away was the guard house, those whom duty called to watch the city, but who during these attacks found it convenient to be deaf and blind.

The struggle round the litter increased, as the people struck down and trampled each other. Atacinus determined to save himself and Lygia, and leave the remainder to fight for themselves; so taking her from the litter, he lifted her in his arms and tried to make his escape in the dark.

But,—“Ursus, O Ursus,” called out Lygia.

Being clothed in white she was readily distinguished, and Atacinus, seeing this, used his free arm to throw over her his mantle, when his neck was seized in a grasp of iron and a huge, heavy weight fell, like a stone, on his head. He fell immediately as an ox before the altar of Jupiter struck with the fatal axe!

Of the slaves some few were lying on the ground whilst the greater part had scattered and escaped round the corners. Only the broken litter remained.

Lygia, borne by Ursus, was taken to the Subura, and the companions of Ursus gradually dispersed as they followed him.

In front of the house of Vinicius the assembled slaves

deliberated, but did not dare to enter. After awhile they decided to go back to the scene of the attack, where they found several bodies, amongst which, was that of Atacinus, who was still alive, but was immediately seized with a violent convulsion, then lay motionless in death. They lifted him and returned a second time before the house, but stopped at the gate. It must be told,—they must relate what had happened. Their master must be told.

"Let Gulo tell," they faltered; "there is blood on his face as on ours; it is far safer for him than for us, for the master loves him. Let Gulo tell it!"

The old slave Gulo was a German who had nursed Vinicius and had been bequeathed to him by his mother, the sister of Petronius.

"Yes! I will tell him," said Gulo, "but do ye accompany me. Let not his anger fall on me alone."

Vinicius, who was consumed with impatience, heeded not the laughter of Petronius and Chrysothemis, as he paced with hasty tread up and down the atrium.

"It is time they were here now. They should have arrived."

He would have started out to meet the procession, but was restrained by Petronius. Suddenly footsteps were heard at the entrance, and the slaves crowded into the atrium, stopping quickly at the wall, while lifting their hands, they groaned aloud,—

"Aaaa—aa"—

Vinicius leaped forward, crying —

"Where is Lygia?" His voice was strained and hoarse.

The only answer was the repeated cry, "Aa—aa."

Gulo stepped forward hastily, showing the blood on his face, and exclaimed pitifully,—

"Behold our blood! my Lord. We have fought; behold our blood!"

Before he had time to finish Vinicius had seized a lamp of bronze and shattered the skull of the slave with a single blow, then burying his head in his hands, he murmured hoarsely —

"Me miserum! me miserum!"

His face became livid, his eyes distorted, and foam stained his lips.

"Whips," commanded he at last, in a terrible voice.

"Have pity, Lord, aa—have pity!" moaned the slaves.

With a look of disgust on his features, Petronius rose to

depart. "Come, Chrysothemis," he said. "If thou wouldst look on raw flesh, I will have a butcher's stall opened for thee on the Carinæ."

With that he left the atrium. But in the house, decked in green for a feast, was heard every minute throughout the long night, the lashing of whips accompanied by groans and cries of agony.

CHAPTER XI.

VINICIUS took no rest all night. After Petronius had left him and while still his anger was unappeased by the whipping he inflicted upon his slaves, nor his pain and unrest diminished by thought, he formed another expedition of the remainder of his household and set out to search for Lygia. In all the alleys and byways of the Esquiline, the Subura and Vicus Sceleratus he sought, then around the Capitol and across the bridge of Fabricius to the island; then he visited a part of the Trans-Tiber.

But this mad rushing search was fruitless, and half aimless, in that he had no expectation of finding her; but it occupied him till the dawn told of the passing of that fearful night. The streets were alive with venders of fruit and vegetables, and the shops were wearing their workaday aspect when Vinicius returned to his home. His first command was to remove the body of Gulo, for as yet no one had dared to do so; then the surviving slaves, victims of the attack of the previous night, he condemned to a punishment they dreaded almost worse than death itself, that of incarceration in the prisons of the rural districts. Finally he retired to the atrium, where he flung himself on a lounge to try and compose himself and to think out some plan of finding and retaking Lygia.

The possibility of never possessing her, never seeing her again, was a thought he could not brook; it staggered him, distracted him, drove him mad. His impetuous nature and iron will had never before encountered its like. That one should have had the courage to resist him, and upset his plans, was a thing not to be comprehended. The destruction of the world would not have seemed to him a more terrible calamity than this failure to achieve his purpose. To have torn from him the treasure that was almost within

his grasp, was an unheard-of crime, not to be dreamed of, worthy of the direst retribution.

He could not, and would not understand why fate should deal him such a blow, for it seemed to him that he had never so ardently wished for anything in his life, as he now yearned for Lygia.

He felt as if life for him were well-nigh impossible without her. How could he live to-day, to-morrow, all the succeeding time? Sometimes his anger against her amounted to a perfect frenzy. He *would* have her, strike her, drag her round the cubiculum, and enjoy her despair; then again he would be seized with a softer feeling of intense longing to hear her speak, to behold her, to gaze into her eyes, to kneel, a broken suppliant at her feet. He called her by name, and pressed his hands to his throbbing temples. He tried again and again, to think clearly how to search for her, but could not. Wild schemes crowded his brain, but all were impracticable, and he finally concluded that she must have been rescued by Aulus, who, in that case, would know her hiding place. Quick as thought he started up, to go to Aulus. He determined that should he disregard his threats, and refuse to give her up, he would appeal to Cæsar and bring about his death for not fulfilling the Imperial command. Before that, however, he must obtain from him a confession where Lygia is hidden.

He would revenge himself on the household of Aulus for this shameful trick, even were she restored to him; he, Vinicius, would still have vengeance. He called to mind a debt of gratitude he owed them: they had tended and watched over him at their home once, in sickness. But, he argued, "Did not this one act render them unworthy of his gratitude?" His wicked passion even took a delight in picturing the bringing of the sentence of death to the house, and the overwhelming grief of Pomponia. Oh! yes, he would bring it about; would not Petronius help him? Besides, he was an Augustian, and of Cæsar's intimates, and to such Cæsar granted their desires, when they did not clash with his own.

But a quick, terrible thought struck him,—so terrible that it seemed to stop the beating of his heart. Suppose Lygia had been taken by Cæsar? As has been said, Nero often amused himself in night attacks, Petronius too sometimes accompanied him. On such occasions women were seized and subjected to the "*sagatio*," for such they termed

the tossing on a mantle until they were rendered unconscious. Sometimes a "pearl" of beauty and youth was found, and it is needless to add, that such were carried forcibly away to one of the many villas of Nero, or given by him to one of his friends. Such might have been the fate of Lygia: Cæsar had seen her; and to the fancy of Vinicius, she must have appeared to him more beautiful than any other woman. It was impossible that he should think otherwise. He remembered that she had been in the Palatinate, in Nero's house, but was it not a fact, as Petronius owned, that Cæsar was cunning in his crimes, lacking courage to openly commit them, even though he possessed power to do so. Then, again, might he not also be afraid of Pop-pæa? This reasoning convinced him that it could not have been Aulus. He would not have dared. Indeed who would? Could it be that huge athlete, the Lygian, who had dared to come into the triclinium and carry her away during Cæsar's feast? No! no slave would dare to go to such a length, and besides, where could he have hidden her. It could be no other than Cæsar. This thought darkened his eyes, and drew beads of perspiration on his forehead. Then indeed were Lygia lost to him! He would tear her from the hands of another, but from Cæsar! that were impossible. And in more despairing agony than before, he again exclaimed:

"Me miserum! me miserum!"

His fancy pictured Lygia in the arms of Nero, and then he knew, for the first time, that there are some thoughts beyond human endurance. He realized then, and only then, how he had loved her.

Like a drowning man to whom memory presents his whole past life, he now remembered Lygia; every word she had spoken, every scene she had graced; at the fountain, the house of Aulus, the feast. He still felt her presence, her scented hair, the rapture of those mad kisses which he had imprinted on her virgin lips at the feast.

With each remembrance, her beauty, her sweetness seemed to be increased a hundredfold. She seemed to be a hundred times more to be desired than ever; more than ever, the only one mortal or divine. And now to think that what had become a part of his whole life and being was in the grasp of Cæsar, caused a physical agony so intense, that he felt he must beat his head against the wall of the atrium until it became a senseless mass. He felt he

was going mad, but the thought of vengeance was left to him, and as he had previously felt that he could not live without Lygia, he now felt that he could not die until his vengeance were satisfied. That calmed his frenzy.

"I will be thy Cassius Chærea," thought he of Nero. Then, after some time, he took earth from the plants around the impluvium and made a solemn vow to Erebus, Hecate, and his household lares to be revenged. This comforted him in a measure. It at least gave him an object in life, something to occupy his thoughts. He gave up the idea of seeking Aulus but commanded to be borne to the Palatine. On the route he came to the conclusion that if he were refused admission, or if he should be searched for concealed arms, that was conclusive proof of Nero's guilt.

He had no arms upon him. But he had temporarily lost his reason and as often happens in people with one sole idea, his only thought was now of vengeance. He did not wish to be deprived of it by any act of present indiscretion.

He desired to see Acte for he hoped she would be able to give him news, and the thought that perhaps he might even see Lygia herself, set him trembling. Nero might have borne her off not knowing who she was, and would return her to him. But on further reflection he dismissed that idea, for if Cæsar had intended to do so, he would have done it already. No! he must see Acte. She, alone, could unravel this mystery and he must see her before any one else.

Feeling determined of this he hurried the slaves along the road, musing, as he went, first on Lygia, then on revenge. The Egyptian priests of Pasht, so he had been informed, could afflict with disease whomsoever they desired. He determined to find out their secret. Then again, he had learned in the East that the Jews are able by incantation to cause ulcers to appear on the bodies of their enemies. He had among his slaves many Jews, and he would wring the secret from them on his return—by torture if necessary. What pleased him most, however, was the thought of the short Roman sword, such as had drawn from Caligula the torrent of blood, whose stains were still indelibly fixed on the columns of the portico.

He was in a mood to destroy all Rome, and if the gods had promised the death of all but himself and Lygia, he would have concurred.

When they reached the arch he became more composed,

but he still mused mentally on seeing the pretorian guard: "If there is any hesitation in giving me admission, I shall hold it proof that Lygia is detained in the palace by command of Cæsar."

But the chief centurion greeted him in a friendly tone, and advancing to meet him said:

"Greeting, noble tribune. If it is thy wish to give homage to Cæsar, the present is an inopportune time. I think that thou canst not see him."

"Wherefore?" asked Vinicius.

"Cæsar and the August Poppæa are with the infant Augusta, who was taken suddenly ill yesterday. A host of physicians have been called from all parts of the city."

That was of great consequence to all the city, for at the birth of the child Cæsar's delight knew no bounds. Before the event, the senate had solemnly committed the womb of Poppæa to the care of the gods, and when the infant was ushered into the world offerings were made at the temple in the atrium; great games took place, and Nero caused a temple to the two Fortunes to be raised. Immoderate in all things, his love for the child was unbounded. Poppæa's love was undoubtedly great also, for was not her position more secure now, and her influence almost unlimited. The fate of the whole Roman Empire might hang on that tiny life; but Vinicius was oblivious to all save himself, his love, his revenge. Paying no heed to the centurion's information he only replied:

"But I only desire to see Acte." And he entered.

But the child engaged Acte's attention also and his wait was a long one. Toward the middle of the day she came in looking pale and tired, but she paled still more on seeing him.

Vinicius took her hand and drew her into the atrium inquiring eagerly if she knew where Lygia was.

"That is the question I wished to put to thee," she replied, giving him a reproachful look.

He had previously determined to put on a calm appearance, but now he pressed his hands against his throbbing temples, while rage and suffering distorted his features.

"She has gone,—was carried off on the road to my house."

Presently he recovered his presence of mind, and putting his face close to that of Acte, he partly hissed,

"Acte! if life holds anything for thee, and thou wouldst

avert evil greater than thou canst imagine, tell me the truth. Was Lygia carried off by Cæsar?"

"No, Cæsar remained in the palace all the day yesterday."

"Swear by all thou holdst holy that she is not in the palace."

"I swear by my mother's spirit, Vinicius, that she is not here, and that Cæsar has not taken her. The young Augusta is sick, and Nero has remained beside her cradle."

Vinicius breathed more freely. The greatest calamity then had not happened.

"If such is the case then," said he, seating himself and clenching his hands, "it was Aulus who stopped her. But let him beware!"

"Aulus Plantius came to the palace this morning, but I was with the child. I did not see him. He inquired of Epaphroditus and others concerning Lygia, and said he would return later to see me."

"That was to avert suspicion. Had he not known what had taken place he would have sought Lygia at my house."

"He left writing on a tablet which will show thee that he knew Cæsar had taken Lygia from his house because thyself and Petronius had so requested, and he thought to find her at this house, whither he called early this morning, and was informed of what had happened."

Saying this she went to the cubiculum, returning with the tablet left by Aulus. After reading the tablet Vinicius was silent, and Acte divined his thoughts from the clouded expression of his features, for, presently, she said, "No, Marcus, it has come about as Lygia herself wished."

"Didst thou know that she wished to escape?" he exclaimed, angrily.

"I knew that she would never be thy mistress." She gazed almost sternly at him with her liquid eyes.

"And thou,—what hast thy whole life been?"

"I was a slave at first."

But the fury of Vinicius was not yet assuaged. Lygia had been Cæsar's gift to him, why should he seek to know what her state had been. She should be found no matter where he sought her, and then he would make her what he pleased. She was his, he *would* make her his mistress, and have her flogged too as often as he wished. When he grew tired of her he would give her to one of his slaves, or send

her to Africa to work on his lands there. Now he would search for her, and when found, would bend her spirit, tread upon it, break her.

As his excitement became more intense, he lost all self-control, and showed even to Acte that his pain and rage led him into making threats greater than he had power to carry out. She could have pitied him had he not wearied her patience by his extravagant outburst. Finally she asked why he wished to see her.

Vinicius did not at once reply. He had asked to see her because he wanted to do so, because he thought she might be able to tell him something: as an actual fact he had come to see Cæsar, but being unable to do so, sought Acte. Lygia by her flight had defied Cæsar, and so he would request from Cæsar an order permitting him to seek her throughout Rome, even should he have to employ all the legions, and search every house in the empire. He would have the support of Petronius, and would commence at once.

"Take care," said Acte, "if, when thou find her, she is not lost again forever by Cæsar's orders."

His brow darkened. "What dost thou mean?" he asked.

"Harken, Marcus Vinicius. As Lygia and I were walking here in the gardens yesterday we were met by Poppæa accompanied by the infant Augusta, carried in the arms of the African Lilith. The child became sick later on and Lilith swears that it is the work of witchcraft, that the stranger they had seen in the gardens had used her arts against her. If the infant recover this would be forgotten, but if not, Lygia will be accused by Poppæa of wicked arts and enchantments, and wherevèr she may be found there will be no hope for her."

Vinicius was silent a moment, then said, "It may be that she did bewitch the child, and has likewise bewitched me."

"Lilith protests that the instant they passed us the child commenced to cry, and that is really true. Of a truth she was very sick when they left the gardens. Marcus, search as thou please for Lygia, but until the recovery of the child mention not her name to Cæsar, or thou wilt bring down on her head the wrath of Poppæa. Thou hast caused her tears enough already; may the gods pity and protect her."

"Thou lovest her, Acte?" questioned Vinicius, sadly

"Yes, I love her!" and the eyes of the former slave were dimmed with tears

"Yes, thou mayst love her, for she has not returned thy love with hatred as she has mine."

Acte watched him hesitatingly for some time as if seeking to find out if he were speaking sincerely, then said :

"Thou foolish, misguided one, she loves thee."

Vinicius sprang to his feet at the sudden surprise caused him by these words.

"That is untrue!" he said. It was hate, not love. Acte knew naught. Was it likely that after but one day's acquaintance Lygia would give her such confidence? Besides what sort of love could that be that chose to wander, to endure the stings of poverty, the uncertainty of the future, or perchance a degrading death, to a house decked for a feast, and a waiting lover. It had been wise not to have told him for he was mad enough already. All the wealth of Cæsar would not have persuaded him to have parted with her. And she left him! What kind of love can it be that inflicts pain and shuns pleasure. It was incomprehensible.

Only the hope of finding her kept him from falling on his sword, and thus ending his anguish. Love delights in giving up, not in stealing away. There had been times when in the house of Aulus he had fancied such happiness, but now he sees it was not love but hatred,—hatred then, hatred now, and she would die hating him.

But the habitually mild and gentle Acte was now roused to indignation. In what manner had he wooed Lygia? Instead of seeking to obtain her hand from Aulus and Pomponia, he forced her from them by cunning. Instead of seeking her as his wife, he desired to make her his mistress, her, Lygia, the adopted daughter of a noble Roman, and the actual daughter of a king. He had caused her to be brought to this infamous place, polluted her guileless eyes with a scene of disgraceful wantonness, and treated her as if she were a member of that shameless crew. He had not remembered, perhaps, that she had been brought up under the pure influence of Aulus and Pomponia Græcina, nor had he sufficient intelligence, perhaps, to know that all women are not as Nigidia, Calvia Crispinilla, Poppæa, or those others met with in Cæsar's court.

Had he not discernment enough, to perceive that Lygia was a virtuous maiden, who would rather meet death than shame? What gods did she worship? How did he know whether hers was not a purer religion than that generally

followed in wanton Rome? No; Lygia had made no confidant of Acte, but had admitted that she looked to him, Marcus Vinicius, for succor. She had thought it possible he might be the means of procuring her restoration to the house of Aulus, and re-unite her to Pomponia. And as Lygia had spoken of him, she gave unmistakable signs of confusion, as one both loving and trusting. Lygia's heart was his, but he had insulted and frightened her, and roused her indignation. Should he ask the aid of Nero's soldiers in pursuing her, and if the child of Poppæa should die, Lygia's fate would be sealed.

The fury and grief of Vinicius now began to melt under softer feelings. To know that Lygia loved him moved him deeply. He called to mind the time he saw her in the garden of Aulus, when she had listened to him with shining eyes and flushed cheeks. Then, he fancied she was learning to care for him, and as the thought grew he was conscious of a happiness a hundredfold more intense, than had been his former desire. Why had he not sought her honorably? he might in time have won her, and her love. In time she would have rubbed his door with wolf's fat, sat on the sheepskin before his hearth as his wife. Her lips would have spoken the sacred marriage words "Where thou art, Caius, there am I, Caia." He had wished to do so. But now he had lost her, perhaps never to find her, and even should she be found, perhaps only to forfeit her life. At best, she would never be able to forgive him, neither would Aulus nor Pomponia. Anger again seized him, this time against Petronius. He was to blame for all; for Lygia's homelessness, his loss, and her danger.

But it was too late to recall the past—to mend the evil already done. Too late!—a precipice had opened before him and he did not know what to do, where to go. Like an echo to his thoughts Acte repeated the words "Too late," and from her lips, they seemed still more hopeless. One thing, however, stood out clear before him—find Lygia, he must!

Drawing his toga mechanically around him, he would have gone without even taking leave of Acte, when the entrance curtain was suddenly drawn aside to admit Pomponia.

It was evident that she had also heard of Lygia's flight. She hoped to find Acte more readily than her husband, and obtain some news from her.

On perceiving Vinicius, she turned her clear, pale face upon him, and said,—“ May God pardon thee, Vinicius, for the wrong done to Lygia and us.”

He remained silent, a feeling of shame and misery lowering his head. He did not know what or why God was to forgive him. Pomponia had rather occasion to speak of retribution than pardon. He departed, at length, his brain bewildered, filled with anxiety, grief, and wonder.

The court and galleries were filled with throngs of anxious inquirers. Soldiers and politicians mingled with the slaves in their eagerness to give open proof of their concern and sympathy. The news that the “ divine child ” was sick had been carried rapidly, and fresh crowds appeared every moment in the gateway and arcade. Some sought information of Vinicius, having seen him leave the palæe, but he answered them not, only hurried on. In his haste, he ran across Petronius, who forcibly stopped him. Of a certainty, the sight of Petronius would have aroused Vinicius’s anger to such an extent, that he would have attacked him even in Cæsar’s palace, if his conversation with Acte had not left him heavy, bruised and broken. For the time being, even his natural color had deserted him.

He would have pushed past Petronius, if the latter had not compelled him to stop.

“ How fares it with the infant divinity ? ” inquired he.

Again the anger of Vinicius rose above control at this constraint.

“ May Erebus seize her and all her kin,” exclaimed he, furiously.

“ Be silent, thou fool,” replied Petronius, glancing around. Then he whispered hastily,—

“ If thou wouldst learn anything of Lygia, come away, I will tell thee what I think,—but not here—in the litter.”

He placed his arm around his kinsman, and drew him quickly away. His chief object was to get him from the crowd. He could give him no actual information but he was a man of activity and full of resource. Notwithstanding his disgust of the day before, he felt some pity for Vinicius, and some sense of responsibility for what had occurred, so he had already himself taken some steps in the matter. After they had seated themselves in the litter, he continued,—

“ My slaves have instructions to keep a watch on all the gates. I have furnished them with an exact description of Lygia and the athlete who took her away from Cæsar’s

feast; for undoubtedly it is the same man. My opinion is this:—Perchance Aulus and Pomponia have attempted to smuggle her to one of their country residences. If so, my slaves will be able to inform us which way they went, and if they see her not, we can commence to search for her with certainty, in Rome.”

“Aulus knows not her whereabouts,” replied Vinicius.

“Art certain?”

“Pomponia also seeks her.”

“The city gates were closed. She could not pass last night. Two slaves are stationed at each gate, one to follow Lygia and her rescuer, the other to acquaint me. She will be easily found in the city, for one can readily tell the Lygian,—he is a giant. How fortunate it was for thee, that the abductor was not Cæsar, and that I am certain of, for I know everything that happens on the Palatine.”

Here Vinicius interrupted him in an outburst of emotion, and with faltering voice acquainted Petronius with what Acte had said; of the added peril o’erhanging Lygia—such peril that were she found it would be necessary to most zealously guard that fact from Poppæa. Then he broke out in invectives against him—Petronius. It was his fault, his evil council that had placed Lygia in this perilous position. Had she but remained with Pomponia he could have seen her daily and would not now be miserable. And as his remembrance grew, reproaches became more bitter until, at last, his voice choked with pain and anger, and tears coursed down his face. At this exhibition of passion and despair, Petronius was lost in wonderment, for he had not thought Vinicius capable of such depths of feeling. He whispered softly to himself,—

“O most mighty Queen of Love! thou indeed dost control the destiny of mortals and divinities.”

CHAPTER XII.

ALIGHTING in front of the arbiter’s house they learned from the chief of the atrium that none of the slaves had returned from the gates whither they had been sent. Food had been taken to them, and strict orders given that no one should leave the city without their knowledge.

“I have no doubt,” said Petronius, “but that they are

still in Rome. My word for it we shall find them. But those sent after Lygia must also watch at the gates, since they will more easily recognize her."

"I will recall my orders, then," said Vinicius, "that they be sent to rural prisons. We shall thus take them at the gates."

Vinicius immediately despatched a written message to his house. Passing into the interior portico, they seated themselves on a marble bench. Bronze footstools were placed for them to rest their feet on, their goblets filled with wine. Eunice and Iras performed this office.

"Is that giant Lygian known to any of thy people, Vinicius?"

"Atacinus knew him, so did Gulo, but both are dead. Atacinus fell at the litter, Gulo I killed with my own hand."

"His death moves me, Vinicius. Not thee only, but me, has he borne in his arms many times."

"And I was to have freed him.—But let us not speak of this. I can only talk of Lygia. Rome is a vast city—"

"But not so large that the eyes of love shall not find what the heart most desires. But Aulus himself has informed thee that he intends making Sicily his abode. If so Lygia might go too. What then?"

"Rome should lose me also. There she would be out of danger; but here, should Cæsar's child die, Poppæa could easily persuade him that Lygia in some mysterious way was the cause."

"That had troubled me also. But even though the child die we shall still discover some means of escape."

After a moment's reflection Petronius added, "We could work on the superstitious belief of both Cæsar and Poppæa. They believe in evil spirits. Why not spread the report that Lygia was carried off by them. This story would readily find belief. Besides her escape was indeed mysterious. This Lygian could never have carried her off alone. He would need help. But where could he have obtained that help?"

"From his fellow-slaves in Rome."

"While they support each other, they are not likely to act against each other, as in this case. Thy people would readily accept the idea of evil spirits. Suppose thou put them to the test. Question one of thy slaves to this effect, and he will swear by the gods that he saw the spirits himself carry her off."

Vinicius was not without superstition himself, which caused him to regard Petronius with sudden disquietude.

"If Ursus did not take her then, who could have done so?"

At this Petronius laughed aloud.

"Thy people will believe anything, Vinicius, since thou art half superstitious thyself. Society, also believing as we would wish, will no longer search for her. In some quiet villa of thine or mine, far from Rome, she would be safe enough."

"And if help came to her"—

"It would come from her co-religionists."

"Who may they be? Can she worship a deity that I do not know?"

"Each Roman woman has a deity of her own. But doubtless hers is the same that Pomponia pays homage to. No one has seen her propitiate our gods. She has been accused of being a Christian, but a proper tribunal has acquitted her of that charge. 'Tis charged to the Christians that they worship an ass's head, hate the human race, and are capable of the worst crimes imaginable. If this is true of the Christians, Pomponia is certainly not one. Her virtue and goodness are too well known."

"Nowhere are slaves treated with such consideration as in the house of Aulus," remarked Vinicius.

"Pomponia once spoke to me of some god, with attributes of power and mercy. How she has disposed of all the other gods is her affair. The Logos of her god cannot be over-mighty, since his adherents comprise no more than three persons,—Pomponia herself, Lygia, and this Ursus. There must be many more, and that Lygia was assisted by them seems plausible."

"'Tis a strange faith," said Vinicius, "that says we must forgive our enemies. I met Pomponia at Acte's house, and she said; 'thou hast wrought evil to us and to Lygia; may God forgive thee for it.'"

"It seems to me their God is some mild mannered *curator*. Seek his forgiveness, Vinicius, and in gratitude for the same return the maiden to her home."

"Twere not well for their God if he were no better. But I feel sick of inaction, am unable to sleep, and have no relish for the enjoyments of life. With a dark lantern I shall go search for her in the city."

Petronius bestowed upon him a look of pity, for Vini-

eius's appearance attested the truth of his statement. Even Iras and Eunice regarded him with a show of sympathy.

"Thou art feverish, Vinicius," said Petronius.

"I feel it in my blood."

"Listen. Let me be thy doctor, and prescribe for thee as I would act myself were I in thy place. Bestow thy love elsewhere till thou canst find Lygia. Thy villa has many beautiful women,—women with divine forms too. Do not interrupt. I have had experience in love. We cannot wholly forget the one we love most dearly, but there are many beautiful slaves in whom thou wouldst find distraction from thy grief."

"I neither need nor desire it," said Vinicius.

"Mayhap thine own slaves have lost the charm of novelty for thee." Resting his hand on the hip of Eunice, Petronius added: "What grace is here! Knowest thou that Fonteius Capiton the younger offered three of the most beautiful boys from Clazomene in exchange for her. Skopas himself never chiselled a more beautiful figure. I wonder why I have remained indifferent to her myself so long,—I, whom even my love for Chrysothemis has not kept chaste. Vinicius, I make thee an offering of her. Wilt thou not have her for thy slave?"

Eunice grew pale when she heard this, and seemed greatly disturbed. She was terrified, and her eyes became fixed on Vinicius till his answer came.

"No, no, Petronius, my love has gone out to Lygia. It is she I want, and none other. I thank thee, though, most warmly for this mark of thy friendship. I go to seek Lygia throughout Rome, even beyond the Tiber, if necessary."

Petronius made no attempt to detain him, seeing that it was useless to turn him aside from his mad love. But he was not going to accept this refusal of his favorite slave so easily. He felt piqued, moreover.

"Bathe and anoint thyself, Eunice, and when robed, present thyself at the house of Vinicius."

Dropping on her knees before him, and uplifting her hands imploringly, she begged Petronius not to send her to Vinicius. Rather would she tend the hypocaustum in his service than be chief slave in the house of Vinicius. She beseeched him to have pity on her, to give orders that she be flogged daily, if only he did not part with

her. She even went so far as to say, "I will not, I cannot go."

Petronius was speechless with amazement. It was an unheard-of thing for a slave to seek to evade the fulfilment of a command, but to hazard such an assertion as "I will not, or, I cannot," amounted almost to a crime which called for immediate and severe chastisement. He could hardly assure himself that he had heard aright. His anger showed itself in an ominous frown. He was not accustomed to brook opposition, and to disturb his equanimity was to arouse his wrath.

"Call Tiresias, girl, and return with him," said Petronius, addressing the kneeling suppliant. Tiresias was chief of the atrium, and a Cretan.

"Take Eunice," said Petronius to him, "and give her five-and-twenty lashes, but so that her skin is not harmed."

Saying this he betook himself to his library, where he resumed his writing of the "*Feast of Trimalchion*." He found work impossible however, so disturbed was he in his mind over Lygia's flight and the illness of the child Augusta. He was not without fears for his own safety, for should Cæsar believe that Lygia had bewitched the infant, blame might attach to him, since it was at his request that she had been brought to the palace. But he felt reassured on reflecting that he could easily disabuse Cæsar's mind of the absurdity of any such suspicion. Then Poppæa's well concealed feelings toward him, Petronius, would cause her to avert any threatened danger to him. This reflection caused him to laugh at his own fears. He would go to the triclinium first to fortify himself, then to the palace, then to the Campus Martius, and afterward to Chrysothemis.

To his surprise he beheld in the corridor of the triclinium, in that part of it set aside for servants, his slave Eunice. She was standing, with other slaves, by the wall. A frown darkened his face, and contracted his brow. He looked around for the Atrienensis. He was not there.

"Hast thou received the punishment I ordered?" he asked of Eunice.

Throwing herself at his feet, and pressing her lips to his toga, she said,—

"Yes, lord, I have."

The tone of her voice showed mingled pleasure and gratitude. She had evidently accepted the lashes given her

as a proof that she might stay at the house of Petronius. He saw this, and the strong desire evinced by the girl not to be sent away set him musing. "It is love," thought he to himself.

"Thou lovest some one in my house?" he asked.

"Yes, lord."

She looked so lovely as she said this, there was such a passionate appeal in her tearful, blue eyes, raised supplicatingly to his, that Petronius, philosopher that he was, and well knowing the power of love, felt the influence of her beauty, and was moved to something of compassion for his slave.

"Which of these lovest thou?" he asked, looking in the direction of the assembled servants.

Eunice made no reply, but inclined her head low.

Pretonius regarded the slaves, among whom were some comely and well formed youths. Their looks revealed nothing to him. Their strange smiles were meaningless to him. Then regarding Eunice for a moment, still kneeling at his feet, he passed to the triclinium musingly, where he had some refreshment, after which he was borne to the palace, and thence to Chrysothemis. He remained with her till late into the night. On his return he summoned Tiresias to his presence.

"Did Eunice receive the lashes?" he inquired.

"Yes, lord. And thou saidst her skin was not to be cut."

"Didst thou receive no other command touching her?"

"None, lord," said the Atriensis, showing evident alarm.

"'Tis well. Which of the slaves does she love?"

"Not any, lord."

"Knowest thou aught of her?"

Tiresias began to speak with faltering voice:

"Eunice never quits the cubiculum at night where she lives with old Acrisiona and Ifida; she goes not to the bath-rooms after thou art dressed. She is ridiculed by the other slaves who call her Diana."

"Enough. To-day I offered her to Vinicius who would not accept her; therefore, she may stay in the house. Thou canst go."

"May I speak further of Eunice, lord?"

"Whatsoe'er thou knowest."

"The whole familia speak of the flight of Lygia. Eunice

has told me that she knew a man who could tell where she was to be found."

"Who is this man?"

"I know not, master; but I thought thou wouldst like to know of this matter."

"It is well. Command that man to my house to-morrow in my name to wait the arrival of the tribune."

The Atriensis bowed himself out. Eunice once more occupied Petronius's thoughts. Had she desired Vinicius to find Lygia that she might not be sent from his house? The thought that this man might be the lover of Eunice whose interest she was seeking to further, disturbed him. Would he summon her to him and question her? No, the hour was late, and he felt the need of sleep. It occurred to him on his way to the cubiculum that he had that day noticed wrinkles round Chrysothemis's eyes. Her beauty, moreover, had been overrated in Rome. Then he thought of Fonteius Capiton's offer for Eunice.—No, he would not sell her so cheaply.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE following morning, Vinicius appeared in the unctorium of Petronius, who was still dressing. Vinicius already knew that no news had come from the gates, and he was greatly worried. There was reason to think that Ursus had carried Lygia out of the city immediately after her abduction, and consequently before the slaves were placed on guard. In the autumn the gates were closed early, it is true, but then, they were opened for people departing from the city, of whom there were not a few. Moreover, the slaves had other means of leaving the city, when they wanted to escape. Vinicius also stationed slaves along the roads leading from the city, had notified the authorities of small outlying towns, of the fugitive pair, giving a detailed description of them, and offering a reward for their apprehension, but it was doubtful whether the pursuit would result in their capture, especially as the authorities were not likely to act on the private request of Vinicius, not indorsed by a pretor. And there was no time for obtaining such indorsement. Vinicius, on his part, in the garb of a slave, had searched every nook and corner of

the city, but without finding the faintest trace of Lygia. He saw Aulus's slaves looking for something,—hence, Aulus had no hand in her escape, and does not know himself where she is.

When Tiresias brought him the information that there was a man who would undertake to find Lygia, the young patrician came hurrying to the house of his uncle, and he had scarcely been shown into the apartment, when he began plying him with questions concerning that man.

"We shall soon see him," answered his uncle. "He is an acquaintance of Eunice, who will presently come to arrange the folds of my toga. She will give us fuller information."

"She, whom thou hadst offered me yesterday?"

"Yes, and whom thou didst reject for which I thank thee, for she is the best vestiplica in the city."

And no sooner did Petronius finish his words than the vestiplica came, and taking his toga from the chair, threw it on the shoulder of Petronius. Gladness sparkled in her eyes.

Petronius looked at her and she seemed to him quite beautiful, and when she stooped to arrange the folds of his toga, he noticed that her hand had the beautiful color of a pale rose, and her bosom and shoulders were as transparent as pearl.

"Eunice," he asked, "has the man come?"

"Yes, master."

"What is his name?"

"Chilo Chilonides, master."

"Who is he?"

"A physician, a sage, a seer who can read people's fates, and predict the future."

"Has he predicted thy future?"

Eunice blushed all over her face, ears and neck.

"Yes, master."

"And what has he predicted?"

"That I shall meet with pain and happiness."

"Pain thou hast experienced yesterday, which was inflicted by the hand of Tiresias, and now happiness should come."

"It has already come, master."

"What is it?"

Eunice whispered:

"I remain here."

He stroked her golden hair.

"The folds are well arranged, and I am satisfied with thee to-day, Eunice."

At the touch of his hand, Eunice's eyes moistened with happiness, and her bosom began to heave.

At the Atrium Chilo Chilonides bowed to the ground when Petronius and Vinicius entered. Petronius smiled at the thought of this man being Eunice's lover. In that strange figure there was something abhorrent and awkward. He was not old, but in his slovenly beard and unkempt curls a grey hair could be seen here and there. His stomach was sunken, his shoulders high, so that he seemed to be hunch backed. His face reminded one of an ape and also of a fox, and his glance was piercing. The yellow skin of his face was covered with pimples, which lay thickest on his nose, showing a passion for spirits. His careless attire, which consisted of a dark tunic and a similar cloak, both tattered, proved a real or feigned poverty. At sight of the man, Petronius thought of Homer's Thersites, and waving his hand in response to the man's greeting, he said:

"Hail, divine Thersites! Do thy sides pain thee yet from the beating Ulysses gave thee at Troy; and how does he fare in the Elysian Fields?"

"Noble master," answered Chilo Chilonides, "Ulysses, the wisest of the dead, sends greetings to Petronius, the wisest of the living, and begs him to cover my sides with a new cloak."

"By the three-headed Hecate!" exclaimed Petronius, "thy answer deserves a cloak!"

But Vinicius was impatient, and interrupted them by the question:

"Knowest thou well what thou art undertaking?"

"When two families in two distinguished houses speak of nothing else, and when the news is on the lips of half the people of Rome, it is not hard to know," answered Chilo. "Last night, the rearing of Aulus Plautius, called Lygia, or more correctly, Callina, was stolen. Thy slaves were escorting her from Cæsar's palace to thy insula. I undertake to find her in the city; and if she has been taken out of the city,—which is very unlikely—I undertake, noble tribune, to indicate whither she has been taken, and where she has been hidden."

"Very well," said Vinicius, who liked the definiteness of the answer, "what means dost thou possess?"

Chilo smiled cunningly:

"Thou hast the means, master; I have the wit."

Petronius also smiled. He was satisfied with his guest.

"That man can find the girl," thought he.

Vinicius knit his brow and sternly said:

"Wretch, if thou deceivest me, I shall have thee beaten to death!"

"I am a philosopher, master; and a philosopher cannot be greedy for gain, especially such as thou generously promisest."

"Ah, so thou art a philosopher?" asked Petronius. "Eunice told me that thou art a physician, and a soothsayer. How comes thou to know Eunice?"

"She came to me for a remedy, for my renown had reached her."

"What remedy did she ask?"

"A remedy for love, master. She wanted to be cured of unrequited love."

"And hast cured her?"

"I did more, master; I gave her an amulet which secures the desired reciprocity. In Paphos, on the island of Cyprus, there is a temple in which a belt of Venus is kept. I gave her two threads from that belt, enclosed in an almond shell."

"And made her pay much for it?"

"Reciprocity has no price, and as I miss two fingers of my right hand, I am collecting a little coin with which to buy a slave copyist to reduce my thoughts to writing so as to preserve my teaching for the world."

"Of what school, then, art thou, divine sage?"

"I am a Cynic, master, because my cloak is rent; a Stoic, because I uncomplainingly bear my poverty; I am also a Peripatetic, because, possessing no litter, I make my way on foot from wine-shop to wine-shop, and on the way I teach those that promise to pay for the wine."

"And at the wine table thou dost become a rhetor?"

"Heracitus said: 'everything flows,' and canst thou deny that wine is fluid?"

"He also taught that fire is a divinity, and that very divinity is burning on thy nose."

"But the adorable Diogenes from Apollonia taught that the essence of all things is air, and that the warmer the air, the more perfect are the people, and that from the warmest air come the souls of sages. But it is cold in the autumn, —ergo, a true sage must warm his soul with wine; for

thou wilt not controvert, master, that a jug even of Capuan or Telesian trash sends a volume of heat through the frail human body."

"Chilo Chilonides, where is thy fatherland?"

"On the Euxine Pontus. I am a Thracian from the city of Mesembria."

"Chilo, thou art great!"

"And unrecognized," melancholically added the sage.

But Vinicius grew impatient again. He was inspired with hope, and wanted to send Chilo forthwith on his search. This conversation seemed to him a waste of time, and he was angered at Petronius.

"When wilt thou begin thy search?" he asked the Greek.

"I have already begun," answered Chilo. "I am searching now, while I am answering thy questions. Have faith, valorous tribune, and know that if thou hadst lost a string from thy foot wear, I should find it, or at least the man who picked it up on the street."

"Have people used thee for similar purposes?" asked Petronius.

The Greek raised his eyes.

"Virtue and wisdom is so little valued, that even a philosopher must seek other means for a livelihood."

"What, then, are thy means?"

"To know everything, and to furnish information to whoever is thirsting for it."

"And for which thou art paid?"

"Ah, master, I need an amanuensis; otherwise wisdom will perish with my death."

"If thou hast not yet earned a cloak, thy services must be insignificant."

"Modesty prevents my extolling them. But think, master, the generous people who took as much pleasure in giving a handful of gold for a slight service as they took in swallowing an oyster from Puteoli, are no more. Not my deserts, but human gratitude is slight. Sometimes a valuable slave would run away, and who can find him but the son of my father? When on the city walls appear inscriptions against the divine Poppæa, who can point out the culprits? Who can scent out on the book-stalls verses against Cæsar? Who reports the conversations of senators and knights? Who carries letters that slaves cannot be entrusted with? Who listens at the doors of barbers, to whom are known all the secrets, of wine-dealers and bakers?

Who is trusted by the slaves? Who can penetrate with a glance every house from the atrium to the garden? Who knows what is said in the *Thermæ*, the market places, the schools of the *Lanistæ*, and even the *Arenariæ*?"

"By the gods! enough, noble sage!" exclaimed Petronius,—“we will drown in thy services, virtue, wisdom and eloquence. Enough! We wanted to know who thou art, and we know now.”

But Vinicius was satisfied. He thought that this man, like a harrier, once put on the scent, would not stop till he had traced the beast to his lair.

“Well,” said he, “what indications needst thou?”

“I need arms.”

“What arms?” Vinicius asked in surprise.

The Greek held out one hand, and with the other made motions as if counting money.

“Such is this world,” he said, sighing.

“Thou wilt then be the ass, who takes the fortress with the aid of gold,” remarked Petronius.

“I am only a poor philosopher; ye are burdened with the gold.”

Vinicius tossed a purse, which the Greek caught in the air, although his right hand was short of two fingers.

Then he raised his head and said:

“Master, I already know more than thou thinkest. The girl was not stolen by Aulus, for I have spoken with his servants. She is not in the *Palatine*, for they are all occupied there with the little sick *Augusta*, and I perhaps divine your reasons for calling me, instead of the *Vigiles* and *Cæsar’s* soldiers, to your aid. I know that escape was effected by a *Lygian* slave. The slaves could not have helped him, because the solidarity among them would have prevented their acting against thy slaves. Only co-religionists” —

“Dost thou hear, Vinicius?” interrupted Petronius. “Have I not told thee the same, word for word?”

“That is the greatest honor for me,” said Chilo, and turning to Vinicius, he continued,—“the girl, no doubt, worships the same divinity that the most worthy *matrona stolata*, *Pomponia*, worships. I have heard also, that *Pomponia* was tried by her own household for worshipping some foreign gods, but I could not learn from her servants what gods those were, or what they call their worshippers. If I could get this information, I should go among them,

become the most zealous follower, and in a few days would gain their confidence. I know that thou, master, hast spent some days in the house of Aulus; canst thou not give me some information?"

"I cannot," answered Vinicius.

"Ye have asked me various things, noble lords; permit me now to ask ye some. Hast thou not seen, worthy tribune, some statues, some sacrifices, some amulets on Pomponia or thy divine Lygia? Hast thou not seen, perchance, some drawings made by them, or signs exchanged between them?"

"Signs? Wait! I saw Lygia once tracing on the sand the form of a fish."

"A fish? A-a! Did she trace it only once?"

"Only once."

"And thou art sure, master, that she traced a fish? O-o!"

"Yes," said Vinicius, his curiosity growing. "Dost thou divine what that means?"

"Do I divine!" exclaimed Chilo, and bowing deeply, added:—"May Fortune bestow her gifts on both of ye!"

"Get thee a cloak!" Petronius said to the departing Greek.

"Ulysses thanks thee for Thersites," answered he, bowing himself out.

"What sayst thou of this noble sage?" asked Petronius.

"I say that he will find Lygia," exclaimed Vinicius, with delight, "and will also say that he would be the king in a kingdom of rogues."

"Without doubt. I must get closer acquaintance with that Stoic, but meanwhile I will have the atrium perfumed."

And Chilo Chilonides, wrapped in his new cloak, played under its folds with the coin given him by Vinicius, and delighted in its jingle. He walked slowly, and looking around to see if they were not looking at him, he passed the portico of Livia, and reaching the corner of Cliaus Virbius turned toward the Subura.

"And now I will go to Sporus," he said to himself, "and offer a few drops to Fortune. I have found, at last, what I have been seeking so long. Young, irritable, as liberal as the mines in Cyprus, and ready to give away half of his fortune for this Lygian linnet. But one must be careful in handling him. His habit of contracting the brows bodes no good. Ah, that the whelps should rule the world! Pe

tronius I do not fear so much. O gods! Is it possible that the trade of a procurer pays better than virtue? Humph! She drew a fish on the sand? May I choke with a piece of goat's cheese if I know what that means. But I will know. But as fish live under the water, and it is harder to seek there than on land,—*ergo*, he will pay me separately for the fish. Another such purse and I could throw off that beggar's sack and buy myself a slave. But what wouldst thou say, Chilo, if I advised thee to buy a female slave? I know thee; I know that thou wouldst consent! If she were as pretty as Eunice, for instance, thou wouldst grow young beside her, and wouldst have a sure and honest income, to boot. I sold to poor Eunice two threads from my own cloak. She is a fool, but if Petronius gave her to me, I should take her. Yes, yes, Chilo, the son of Chilo! Thou hast lost thy father and mother; thou art an orphan; buy thee a female slave and be consoled. As she must live somewhere, Vinicius will house her, and thou wilt have shelter; she must dress, and Vinicius will buy her clothes; she must eat,—let him feed her. Oh, the burden of life is heavy! Where are those times when for an obolus one could buy as much salt meat and beans as would fill both hands, or a piece of goat's entrails, filled with blood, as large as a boy's hand? But there is that rogue Sporus! I may learn something in the wine-shop."

He walked in and ordered a jug of "black," but seeing the inquiring look of the wine-dealer, took a gold-piece from the purse, and placing it on the table, said:

"Sporus, I have studied with Seneca to-day, from dawn till midday, and this is what my friend gave me at parting."

The round eyes of Sporus became more round at the sight of the gold-piece, and immediately there was wine before Chilo. The latter dipped his finger in the jug, drew a fish on the table, and said:

"Knowest thou what that means?"

"A fish? Well, a fish is a fish."

"Thou art a dullard, although there is so much water in thy wine that thou mightst find a fish in it. This is a symbol, which in the language of philosophers, means 'the smile of Fortune.' If thou couldst understand it, Fortune would smile on thee also. Respect philosophy, I tell thee, or I shall find another wine-shop, which I was requested to do by my personal friend, Petronius."

CHAPTER XIV.

CHILO did not show himself anywhere for several days. Vinicius, who learned through Acte that Lygia loved him, was even more anxious to find her, and started an independent search, having neither opportunity nor desire to ask aid of Cæsar, who was preoccupied with the sick little Augusta.

The offerings made in the temples, the prayers, the art of the physicians, the magicians' skill were of no avail. In a week the child died. The palace and the whole city were in mourning. Cæsar, who, at the birth of the child, grew as joyous as a child, was now plunged in despair. The senate held an extraordinary session, and the child was deified; it was decreed to erect to her a temple. In all temples sacrifices were offered; statues from precious metals were cast of her, and the interment was one grand solemnity. The people were wondering at the sorrow exhibited by Cæsar, wept together with him, stretched out their hands for a sop, but, above all, amused themselves with the unusual spectacle.

Petronius was alarmed at the death of the child. It was known that Poppæa ascribed it to sorcery, in which belief she was upheld by the physicians, whose skill had failed; by the priests, who were powerless; by the sorcerers, who were trembling for their lives; and by the people. Petronius was glad that Lygia ran away. He wished Aulus no ill, but he also wished good to himself and Vinicius; as soon, therefore, as the cypress, set before the Palatine in sign of mourning, was removed, he went to the reception, given to the senators and Augustinians, to ascertain whether Nero really believed the rumors of sorcery, and warn him of the consequences of such a belief.

Petronius knew Nero, and he knew that though the latter did not credit the sorcery idea, he would nevertheless feign belief to magnify his grief, and also to vent his despite on some one, and, finally, to discourage the supposition that the gods have begun to punish him for his crimes. Petronius did not think that Cæsar could really love even his

own child, although he was often fervent in his love; but he was certain that Nero would exaggerate his grief. And he was not mistaken. When the senators and knights came to console him, his face was as immovable as stone, and his eyes were fixed on one point, and it was apparent that he was thinking of the impression he was producing, and was posing as Niobe, as would a low-class comedian on the stage. He could not endure this silent grief, so he from time to time raised his hands above his head as if covering it with ashes of the dead, and groaned, and when he espied Petronius, he sprang up and cried in a tragic voice so that everybody could hear him:

"Ehue! Thou art guilty of her death! It was at thy advice that an evil spirit entered these walls,—the spirit that with one look drew the life-blood from the child! Woe is me! It were better that my eyes had never seen the light of Helios! Woe is me! Ehue! Ehue!"

And still raising his voice, he began to shout despairingly. But at this moment Petronius decided to stake everything on one card; he quickly tore the silk kerchief which Nero wore around his neck and placed it on the emperor's mouth.

"Sovereign!" he said, pompously. "Burn all Rome and the rest of the world with thy grief, but spare us thy voice!"

The assembly was surprised; even Nero was surprised; Petronius alone was imperturbable. He very well knew what he was about. He knew that Terpnos and Diodorus had been expressly commanded to forcibly prevent Cæsar from raising his voice, if it should become apparent that he would spoil it by his wailing.

"Cæsar," he continued, in the same strain, "we have suffered an irremediable loss; do not deprive us of the only treasure left us."

Nero's face quivered, and his eyes filled with tears. All of a sudden he embraced Petronius, dropped his head on his breast, and in a voice shaking with sobs, he kept repeating:

"Thou alone of all the people thought of this, Petronius! Thou alone!"

Sophonius Tigellinus grew yellow from envy, and Petronius continued:

"Go to Antium! there she came into the world; there joy brightened thy life; there wilt thou find relief. Let thy divine throat be freshened by the sea air; let thy breath

breathe its saline humidity. We shall devotedly follow thee, and while we will assuage thy grief with our devotion, thou wilt allay ours with thy songs."

"Yes," answered Nero, with compassion, "I will write a hymn in her honor, and will set it to music."

"And then thou wilt seek the warm sun of Baia."

"And then—forgetfulness in Greece."

"In the home of poetry and song."

And the care-tuned mind of Cæsar, little by little gave away to a more cheerful mood, as disappear the clouds that obscure the sun. Conversation was started, which, though full of sadness, was not without plans for the future,—conversation about journeys, artistic novelties, even about receptions then in preparation for Tiridates, the King of Armenia. Tigellinus, it is true, attempted to return to the subject of sorcery, but Petronius, sure of his victory, openly picked up the gauntlet.

"Tigellinus," said he, "thinkest thou that sorcery can injure the gods?"

"Cæsar himself spoke of it," answered the courtier.

"Grief was speaking, not Cæsar; but what thinkest thou of the matter?"

"The gods are too powerful to be subject to charms."

"Then thou dost not admit the divinity of Cæsar and his family?"

"Peractum est!" said Eprius Marcellus, who stood near by.

Tigellinus was jumping out of his skin, but restrained himself. There was a rivalry between him and Petronius, and though Nero was less restrained in his presence, Petronius always managed to get the best of him with his wit and sharp retort.

And so it happened this time. Tigellinus was silent, and took mental note of those senators and knights who, after Petronius had gone to another part of the hall, surrounded him, expecting that after all that had happened, he would become the favorite of Cæsar.

Petronius, after he had left the palace, went to Vinicius, and told him of the encounter.

"Not only have I warded off the danger that threatened Aulus Plautius, Pomponia, and ourselves, but even Lygia will not be sought for now, because I have persuaded Bronzebeard, the monkey, to go to Antium, and thence to Naples or Baia. And he will go, because in Rome he has not dared

so far to appear in the theatre, and I know that he has been yearning to appear at Naples. He is also dreaming of Greece, where he would like to appear in the larger cities, and then make a triumphal entry into Rome with all the wreaths which the Græculi will present him with. And during his absence we will be able to search for Lygia, and conceal her in a safe place. And, by the way, has our noble philosopher been here yet?"

"Thy noble philosopher is a cheat. No, he has not been here, he has not, and will not show himself."

"I have a better opinion of him,—not of his honesty, but his wit. He has already subjected thy purse to a blood-letting, and he will come to repeat the operation."

"Let him look out! The next blood-letting will be his own, and the instrument my stick."

"Do not attempt it. Have patience with him until thou art perfectly sure of his being a cheat. Give him no more money, but promise him a liberal reward for correct information. And what hast thou personally done?"

"Two of my freedmen, Nymphidius and Demas, are searching her at the head of forty men. I have promised freedom to the slave that will find her. Besides that, I have dispatched men to all the eating-houses on the roads leading from the city, and I myself walk day and night through the streets in the hope of a chance meeting with them."

"Send me all the tidings, for I must repair for Antium."

"Very well."

"And if when waking some fine morning, thou shouldst come to the conclusion that it is not worth while to grieve over one girl, then come to Antium. There will be no lack of women there, or diversion."

Vinicius was pacing the floor with long strides. Petronius looked at him and said:

"Give me thy sincere answer, not as an enthusiast, who is pervaded by a single idea, but as a sober-minded man who is speaking to a friend: Art thou still infatuated with Lygia?"

Vinicius stopped for a moment, looked at Petronius, and then began pacing the floor again. It was apparent that he was repressing the fit of anger he was ready to get into. But recognizing his impotence, and overwhelmed with sorrow, anger, and an unconquerable longing, he gave vent

to a flood of tears, which were a more eloquent answer to Petronius than words could form.

Petronius thought for a moment, and then said:

"The world does not rest on the shoulders of Atlas, but of woman, who often plays with it as with a ball."

Vinicius nodded his assent.

They were on the point of parting, when a slave announced Chilo Chilonides, whom Vinicius ordered to be admitted forthwith. And Petronius said:

"Ha! have I not told thee? By Hercules! keep thy temper, else he will get control of thee, instead of thou getting control of him."

"My greeting and esteem to the *Tribunus Militum*, and to thee, lord!" said Chilo, as he entered the room. "May your happiness be equal to your glory, and may your fame spread throughout the world, from the columns of Hercules to the boundaries of the Parthian Kingdom."

"Hail, O lawgiver of virtue and wisdom," answered Petronius.

With feigned calmness Vinicius asked:

"What bringest thou?"

"At first I brought thee hope, and now I bring assurance that the girl will be found."

"Which means that thou hast not found her yet?"

"Yes, lord; but I have found the meaning of the sign which she made; and I know the name of the God whom her rescuers are worshipping."

Vinicius was about to spring from the chair in which he was sitting, but Petronius placed his hand on his shoulder, and, turning to Chilo, said:

"Speak on!"

"Art thou perfectly certain, master, that it was a fish that the maiden drew on the sand?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Then she is a Christian, and Christians rescued her."

There was silence for a moment.

"Listen, Chilo," finally said Petronius. "My relative has set aside for thee a considerable sum of money if thou findest the girl, but he also has reserved a greater number of rods if thou deceive him. In the first case thou wilt be able to buy not one, but three copyists; in the second, the philosophy of all the seven sages will not find thee a healing salve."

"The girl is a Christian, master!" exclaimed Chilo



"THEY CALLED ME MASTER AND FATHER."

"Stop, Chilo. Thou art not a fool. We know that Junia Silana and Calvia Crispinilla have accused Pomponia Græcina of adhering to the Christian superstition, but we also know that she has been cleared of the charge by a domestic court. Wouldst thou renew the accusation? Wouldst thou make us believe that Pomponia, and with her Lygia, belong to the enemies of the human race, to the poisoners of wells and fountains, to the worshippers of an ass's head, to the people who kill children and give themselves up to the most loathsome rakishness? See to it, Chilo, that the thesis thou art announcing do not rebound as an antithesis on thy own back."

Chilo spread out his arms and shrugged his shoulders to convey the expression: "It is not my fault," and then he said:

"Master, utter the following in Greek: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour."

"Very well. Now I have uttered it. What comes of it?"

"Now take the first letters of each of those words and put them into one word."

"Fish," said the surprised Petronius.*

"That is why a fish became the emblem of Christians," proudly answered Chilo.

There was a moment of silence. There was something so striking in the conclusion of Chilo, that the two friends could not restrain their wonder.

"Vinicius," asked Petronius, "art thou sure that Lygia drew a fish?"

"By all the infernal gods, it is enough to drive one mad!" said the young man, excitedly. "If she had drawn a bird, I should have said it was a bird."

"She is therefore a Christian!" repeated Chilo.

"Therefore, Pomponia and Lygia poison wells, kill children, and give themselves up to loathsome rakishness," said Petronius. "Nonsense! Thou, Vinicius, hast been longer in their house, I but seldom, but I know sufficiently well Aulus and Pomponia and even Lygia, to say: It is contemptible and stupid! If a fish is the symbol of Christianity, which it is really difficult to deny, then by Proserpina! Christians are not what we thought them to be."

"Thou speakest like Socrates," answered Chilo. "Has

* Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour—in Greek, Iesoys Christos Theoy Yios Soter; the first letters form the word *Ichtyos*, the Greek word for "fish."

any one ever inquired about the Christians? Is any one acquainted with their religion? When three years ago I was coming to Rome from Naples (oh, why did I not remain there!), I was joined by a man, named Glaucus, who was said to be a Christian, and yet I was convinced that he was a good and virtuous man."

"And from that virtuous man thou hast now learned the meaning of the fish?"

"Alas, master! In one of the eating-houses on the road, some one stuck a knife into the breast of the old man, and his wife and children were carried away by slave-dealers. In my attempt to defend them I lost these two fingers. And as the Christians do not lack miracles, I entertain the hope that my fingers will grow again."

"What? Hast also turned Christian?"

"Since yesterday, master,—since yesterday. That fish has made me a Christian. See what a power there is in it! And in few days I shall be the most zealous of the zealous; I shall be admitted into all their secrets, and I shall know where the girl is hidden. Perhaps my Christianity will pay me better than my philosophy. I have also made a vow to Mercury, that if he help me to find the girl, I will sacrifice to him two heifers of the same age and size, and will have their horns gilded."

"Thy Christianity of yesterday, and thy earlier philosophy do not prevent thee then to believe in Mercury?"

"I always believe in whatever may be necessary for me to believe in,—there is my philosophy, which ought to be to the taste of Mercury. Unfortunately, ye, worthy lords, know how suspicious he is. He would not trust the promises of the most modest philosophers, and would, perhaps, prefer the heifers in advance,—and that would be an enormous outlay for me. Not every one of us is a Seneca, and I shall be short in means; but if the noble Vinicius, on account of the promised sum"—

"Not an obolus, Chilo," said Petronius, "not an obolus! His lavishness will exceed thy expectations, but only when Lygia will be discovered,—that is, if thou point out her hiding place. Mercury must trust thee for the two heifers, although I am not surprised that he refuses to do so, and I concede his wisdom in that respect."

"Listen to me, good masters. I have made a great discovery; for though I have not found the girl, I am on her trail. There, ye have sent freedmen and hirelings all over

the city and the country, and has any one brought indications? No! And I will tell ye more. There may be Christians among your slaves, of whom ye know nothing; and who, instead of aiding, will betray ye. It is not well that I am seen here, and therefore, thou, noble Petronius, give orders to Eunice to be silent; and thou, equally noble Vinicius, make it known that I sell thee an ointment which, if applied to the heels, insures success in the circus. I will seek alone, and will find the runaways; and ye trust me, and know that whatever ye may advance me will only be an incentive, for I shall always hope for more, and the more I will get, the more faith will I have that the promised gift will not fail me. Ah, yes! As a philosopher I hate money, which is more than Seneca, Musonius, or Cornutus do, who, however, have not lost any of their fingers in defense of some one, and can write and leave their names to posterity. But aside from the slave that I intend to buy; and aside from the heifers I promised to Mercury,—and ye know how dear cattle have become—the search itself requires an outlay of considerable sums of money. Only listen to me patiently. Although my feet were swollen, I made a round the other day of all the wine-shops, bakeries, and fish markets; have spoken to all the slaves, mule-drivers, masons; have seen people who cure kidney complaints, pull teeth; have spoken to buyers of dry figs; have been on the cemeteries. And know ye for what purpose? To draw fishes, look people in their faces, and hear what they say when they see the sign. I did not notice anything for a long time, but once, near a fountain, I saw an old slave, drawing water, and weeping. When I asked the cause of his tears, he told me that all his life he had been collecting sestertium upon sestertium in order to release his only son; but that his master, Pausa, himself the freedman of the great Pausa, took his money and kept his boy in slavery. ‘So I am weeping,’ said the old man, ‘and though I repeat, Let the will of God be done, I cannot, poor sinner, restrain my tears.’ Then I dipped my finger in his bucket, and drew a fish, and the old man said: ‘And my hope too is in Christ.’ I asked him if he recognized me by that sign, and he answered: ‘I have, and peace be with thee!’ I mingled my tears with his, which was not hard for me, because of my good heart, and the pain in my feet, caused by excessive walking. Thus I began to sound the old honest man, and he told me everything. That his

master employs many slaves in building houses, and that there are many Christians among them; that these Christians meet and conduct prayers, and after I had explained my ignorance of their place of meeting by telling him that I had just arrived from Naples, and had lost the letters given me by the Neapolitan brethren, he told me to come to the river at night, and that he would acquaint me with the brethren, and that they would take me to the houses of prayer, and introduce me to the elders who govern the Christian community. Hearing this I was so overjoyed that I gave him money enough to redeem his son, in the hope that generous Vinicius will return it twofold."

"Chilo," said Petronius, "in thy story falsehood floats on the surface of truth, like oil on water. Thou hast brought important news,—I do not deny it; and I even affirm that thou art on the right path,—but do not mix falsehood with the news. What is the name of the old man who told thee that Christians know each other by the sign of a fish?"

"Euricius, master. Poor, unfortunate man! He reminded me of Glaucus, whom I defended from highwaymen, and he touched me mainly by this."

"I believe that thou hast met him, and that thou wilt be able to make good use of him; but money thou hast not given him. Thou hast not given him an as. Dost understand me?"

"But I helped him draw buckets of water, and spoke with the greatest compassion of his son. Yes, master, nothing can equal the acuteness of Petronius. True, I gave him no money, or, rather, I gave him money, but only in spirit, which, had he been a true philosopher, should have sufficed him. And I gave the money because I considered it both necessary and useful, for, think, master, how it will win over Christians to me, and how I will gain their confidence!"

"True," said Petronius, "and thou didst right."

"I came here, for this very reason, to get the means."

Petronius turned to Vinicius:

"Order that five thousand sestertia be counted out to him, but only in spirit."

But Vinicius said:

"I will give thee a boy, who will take the necessary sum; and thou wilt tell Euricius that the boy is thy slave, and thou wilt count out the money to the old man, in the

youth's presence. But that as thou hast brought important information, thou wilt get the other five thousand. Come back in the evening for the boy and the money."

"There is a real Cæsar!" said Chilo. "Permit me, lord, to dedicate my compositions to thee, but permit me, also, to come this evening for the money only. Euricius told me that all the boats were unladen, and that loaded ones will soon arrive from Ostia, when his slaves will come to unload them. Peace be with you! Thus the Christians take leave of one another. I will buy a slave-woman,—that is, a man I meant to say. Fish are caught on hooks, and Christians on fish. Pax vobiscum! pax! pax!"

CHAPTER XV.

PETRONIUS TO VINICIUS :

"I AM sending this letter from Antium by a faithful slave, and hope thou wilt return a reply at once by the same bearer, though I know thou canst wield the sword better than the pen. When I came away, thou wast hopeful, and apparently on the right track. By this, I trust, thou art basking in the sunny smiles of Lygia, or at least wilt do so, before the biting blasts of winter descend from the mountains upon the Campania. O, Vinicius, may that beautiful Queen of Love be thy teacher, and may thou in turn instruct thy fair Lygia, who is now fleeing like Aurora from the embraces of the sun-god. Thou, carissime, art the sculptor, who must give form and beauty to this piece of marble, which, though beautiful and costly in itself, only reaches its full worth, when a master hand has fashioned it according to some form of his fancy. It is not enough only to love; one must know also how to love, and how to lead others to love.

"The vulgar throng, and the beasts all have pleasurable instincts, but only among the higher order of men has love become an art. He, only, is able to appreciate its worth, and bears it ever in mind, and so satisfies not alone the cravings of the body, but of the soul also.

"Many a time here in the court circle of Cæsar, I feel the shallowness of life; the fickleness and tediousness of it all. And then I know, that thy career has been more wisely chosen than mine, for love and war are the only

things in life worth living for. Mayst thou be as successful in love, as thou hast been in war. Shouldst thou wish to know what is happening at court, I will keep thee informed.

“Well, the divine Cæsar is here at Antium, zealously caring for his ‘divine’ voice, and still as zealously hating Rome. He purposes to sojourn in Baiaë during the winter, when he will show himself in public in Naples, whose Greek population will better appreciate him than do the barbarians of Rome. They will flock from Pompeii, Puetoli, and the neighboring cities, and will spare neither their money nor their applause. He still mourns the divine Augusta—in public, singing hymns—his own compositions, so marvelously beautiful that they have caused the sirens to hide in the deepest recesses of the ocean. The dolphins, who were not so envious, could not listen, for the sound of the waves, or they would also hide. No; our grief is not yet assuaged, so he will call all the best of the sculptor’s art to portray our beauty and our sorrow to the world,—and will notice if this beauty is appreciated by the world. Oh, Vinicius; I fear we shall die clowns and fools!

“The Augustians, both male and female, are all here, with some ten thousand attendants, and the five hundred she-asses whose milk Poppæa uses for her bath. They say that Calvia Crispinilla, who is already showing signs of increasing years, has begged to be allowed to use that bath as soon as Poppæa has bathed. Lucan has struck Nigidia because he suspected her of an intrigue with a gladiator, and Sporus gambled away his wife at dice. Senecio is the winner. I have refused an offer of four chestnut horses which are almost certain to gain this year’s prize. Torquatus Silanus would have given them for Eunice. I am glad thou didst refuse her! Poor Torquatus! he is altogether unconscious of the fate hanging over him. His sin is that of being the grandson of the divine Augusta Cæsar, and so, there is no hope for him—his death has been already settled.

“Thou knowest that Tiridates is looked for here, but instead there has come an annoying letter. Vologeses has conquered Armenia and threatens not to yield it to any one save Tiridates. Such absurdity! to thus cause war! Corbulus is to be in command, and will be invested with as much authority, as was Pompeius Magnus in his struggles against pirates. This was not, however, given unhesitatingly by

Cæsar, who fears he may be too successful and consequently too popular to suit the vanity of Nero. Once, even, it was suggested to send Aulus Plautius instead, but this did not meet with Poppæa's approval, who is most bitterly jealous of Pomponia's virtuous renown. Vatinius was telling us of a great gladiatorial fight which is to be held at Beneventum. How plebeians are elevated in these times, despite the proverb, 'Ne sutor ultra crepidam!' Why Vatinius himself is a cobbler's son, and Vitellius descended from one!

"A marvelous interpretation of *Œdipus* was given us yesterday by the actor Aliturus. Being a Jew, I asked him if the Jews and Christians are one. But he replied, 'Not so, the Jews have an abiding religion, but that of the Christians is a new one lately started by a sect in Judea.' These Christians worship as a god, a man who in the reign of Tiberius was crucified by the Jews, and they refuse to acknowledge any other gods, particularly ours. They are becoming more numerous every day. I cannot see why they should not recognize all.

"The secret animosity of Tigellinus toward me hath now shown itself, but as yet he is no match for me. He has this advantage, however, that he is both more unscrupulous and clings more to life, and so he and *Ahenobarbus* will gradually draw nearer and unite to accomplish my fall. I know not when, but I know that it is inevitable; and so let it come. Until then we must pass the time as merrily as we can. But for Nero, life would not be so bad after all, but he causes a man to have a contempt for himself and for life. One is tempted to compare this fight for favor to the struggle in the arena, but here flattery gains the prize. I often argue thus with myself and then I am reminded of *Chilo* and feel myself no better than he. When thou hast done with him, send him to me, for his arguments amuse me. Greet thou, for me thy Christian and say to her that I pray she will not be a fish to thee. Tell me how fares thy health, and thy love, and remember to learn how to love and how to teach it. Farewell!"

VINICIUS TO PETRONIUS:

"I have not yet found *Lygia*, but hope to do so soon, or I should not yet write thee. When one becomes weary of life, he cares not to write to his friends. I was become somewhat suspicious of *Chilo*, and so one night when he had cause for a further sum of money to give to *Euricius*, I

wrapped myself in a soldier's cloak and followed him and the slave I sent to accompany him. I hid myself behind the pillar of a portico at a little distance to assure myself of the real existence of Euricius. I saw below me many people, some engaged in bearing stones from a barge and others in piling them. Chilo went up to them and entered into conversation with an old man, who after some moments sank at his feet, and others came up and shouted in praise. Euricius received the purse from the slave with prayer and uplifted hands. Another one, who methinks must have been his son, knelt beside him. Chilo spoke to them words I could not learn, then he gave his blessing to all, and made a peculiar sign in the air like a cross. This sign they all have a great reverence for, for all bowed the knee.

"I could scarcely withstand the ardent wish I had to join them, and offer three full purses to the one who would show me Lygia; but I was afraid to do so lest it should interfere with the work of Chilo; so I turned and departed.

"This was when thou hadst been gone twelve nights, and since then I have been many times with Chilo. He claims to be great among the Christians and says he has not yet discovered Lygia because the Christians here are so many, that they are not all acquainted with each other. Besides which, they must exercise much carefulness and reserve; nevertheless, he thinks to become conversant with all their private concerns when he becomes known to their elders. Many of these, whom the Christians call presbyters, he knows already and questions them, though very guardedly, in order to arouse no fear, for that would hinder the search. I chafe under the delay, but I know he is right and I wait.

"He has found out also that they meet to pray in unfrequented parts without the city, in deserted houses, in sandpits, sometimes; indeed they have many meeting grounds, where Christ is worshipped and praised, and religious feasts are held. Chilo's idea is that Lygia does not go to those frequented by Pomponia, so that Pomponia may be able to say with truth if examined by the authorities that she is ignorant of Lygia's whereabouts. No doubt this is in accordance with the council of these elders. I am always pondering on these meeting places, and though Chilo disapproves, when he has discovered where they may be found I will go with him; and if the gods permit me once

to see Lygia, I take Jove to witness my vow not to lose her a second time. Their meetings are held at night and Chilo fears to take me with him, but I must, I will go, I should know Lygia instantly, in the night, or however closely veiled, I should recognize her anywhere. I am convinced that she has not left Rome; she may be even near me. When Chilo comes to-morrow, he and I will go to these Christians; we will go armed. With me she will be far, far better than with the host of poor amongst whom she dwells. I will refuse her nothing. Thou hast written that my choice was a wise one—it was sorrow and pain. Every morning I rise hopeful, or I could not live. One must learn *how* to love thou sayst, I used to know how to speak of it, but now I can only feel. I only wait for Chilo, and my own house has become unbearable. Farewell!"

CHAPTER XVI.

It was so long since Chilo made his appearance, that Vinicius knew not what to think of his absence. He knew that a successful search cannot be made in haste, but his blood, and impetuous temper revolted against reason. To sit and wait with folded arms was to be violently at odds with his habits, and he could not reconcile himself to passing his time in that manner. To run about the byways of the city, and return without obtaining any results, seemed to him only a self-delusion, and gave him no satisfaction. His freedmen turned out to be less experienced than the Greek. At the same time, he was playing a double game,—that of the lover, and the gambler, who is bound to win. Vinicius was such a person from earliest youth. He knew not what it was to fail, and could not understand that it is sometimes necessary to yield something. For a time, the military discipline had curbed his wilfulness, but, at the same time, had imbued him with the conviction that every command of his to his subordinates must be obeyed, and his long stay in the Orient, among people habituated to slavish obedience, had hardened him in the conviction that there were no limits to his "I will." And now his vanity was deeply wounded.

The various happenings were puzzling him, and racking his brain. He felt that Acte had told the truth, that

Lygia was not indifferent to him. But if so, why should she prefer wandering and poverty to his love, his house? But he could find no answer to this question. He finally discerned some difference between himself and Lygia, between his world and that of Petronius, Lygia and Pomponia, some misunderstanding as deep as an abyss which could not be filled up with anything he knew. Then it seemed to him that he must lose Lygia, and at the thought, lost the remnant of balance which Petronius sought to preserve in him. There were moments when he did not know whether he loved or hated Lygia, and only knew that he must find her, that he would rather die than give up the hope of finding and possessing her. And he often saw her in imagination standing before him; he felt her presence, felt her in his arms, and then his passion consumed him. And when he remembered that she loved him, and would voluntarily give herself up to all his desires, he was seized with an unconquerable sorrow, and a tenderness filled his heart, like a mighty wave. But there were also moments when he turned pale with rage and delighted in thoughts of the punishment and humiliation to which he would subject Lygia when he found her. He wished not only to possess her, but to possess her as a humiliated slave, and at the same time felt that if he had the choice of being her slave or never seeing her, he would rather be her slave. He often thought of the red stripes the lash would leave on her rosy body, and at the same time he wanted to kiss them. He thought he would be happy if he could kill her. Racked by these contradictory feelings, and these sufferings, he began to lose his health, and even his beauty. He became unapproachable and fierce. His slaves, and even his freedmen feared him, and when punishments—as merciless as they were undeserved—were heaped upon them, they began to hate him. Vinicius knew it, and keenly feeling his own isolation, he inflicted still greater punishment on them. With Chilo, however, he restrained himself, from fear that the Greek might cease his searches; and Chilo, considering the matter, turned it to his own account. He began to gain control over him, and became more and more exacting.

At first he assured Vinicius that the search would terminate quickly and successfully; then he himself invented difficulties, and though he did not cease vouching for the inevitable success, did not conceal the fact that it would require considerable time.

Once he came to Vinicius with such dejection in his countenance that the young man turned pale, and running forward to meet him, he scarcely found strength to ask :

"She is not among the Christians?"

"On the contrary, master; but I found Glaucus among them."

"Of what art thou speaking, and who is Glaucus?"

"Thou has forgotten, master, the old man, with whom I traveled from Naples to Rome, and defending whom I lost two fingers. I left him dying in the inn, and shed tears over him. Alas! I found him alive, and he belongs to the Christian community."

Vinicius, who could not guess the purpose of this narration, thought that Glaucus was hindering Chilo's search, and, repressing his anger, said :

"If thou hast defended him, he ought to be grateful, and help thee."

"Ah, worthy tribune; even gods are not always grateful, let alone men!— Yes, he ought to be grateful to me. Unfortunately, the old man is weak-minded, and sorrow-stricken, and instead of thanking me, he accuses me before his co-religionists of being the cause of the loss of his family. That is my reward for the loss of two fingers, without which I cannot write."

"I am certain, rascal, that it was as he says!"

"Then thou knowest more than he does, lord," said Chilo with dignity. "He merely surmises that it was so, but that would not prevent his summoning the Christians to avenge him. And would undoubtedly do so, and they would as undoubtedly help him; but, luckily, he does not know my name, and did not recognize me in their house of prayer. I, however, recognized him at once, and wished at first to throw myself on his neck, but my judiciousness, and the habit of considering my every step, kept me back. As I left the house, I began to inquire about him, and I was told that he was the man who had been betrayed by his comrade on their way from Naples to Rome. That is how I came to know that he is spreading such a report."

"That does not concern me. What sawest thou there?"

"It dost not concern thee, but it concerns me as much as my safety. As I wish that my teachings should survive me, I prefer to renounce the reward thou hast offered me to sacrificing my life to Mammon; for I shall be able to

live without her, and, as a true philosopher, seek divine truth."

With an ill-boding countenance Vinicius approached the Greek and said in a suppressed voice :

"And who told thee that thou wouldst meet death at the hands of Glaucus sooner than at mine? How knowest thou, dog, that thou wouldst not now be buried in my garden?"

Chilo was a coward, and a single glance at Vinicius satisfied him that another unguarded word would bring him to a disastrous end.

"I will search for her, master, and I will find her," he exclaimed, hurriedly.

After a short period of silence, the Greek, seeing that Vinicius had calmed a little, resumed :

"Death passed me, but I looked on it with the stoicism of Socrates. No, master, I only meant that the search is accompanied with great danger to me. Thou didst doubt once that Euricius existed, and now thou doubtest the existence of Glaucus, although thou hast seen the former with thy own eyes, and knowest that the son of my father spoke the truth. If Glaucus did not exist, I should be able to go freely among the Christians. But Glaucus is a live obstacle; and had he seen me once, thou wouldst never see me again, and in that case who would find the girl?"

He began to dry his tears, and in a little while, continued :

"But while Glaucus lives, how can I seek her? A chance meeting with him will put an end to me."

"What hintest thou at? What is the way out, and what dost thou wish to undertake?"

"Lord, Aristotle teaches us that the lesser should be sacrificed for the greater; and King Priam often said that old age is a great burden. And Glaucus is so oppressed with old age and misfortune, that to him death would be a godsend. And what, according to Seneca, is death, but a release?"

"Play the fool with Petronius, not with me! Tell me thy desire."

"If virtue is foolishness,—may the gods grant me to remain a fool the rest of my life! I want, master, to remove Glaucus, who is a constant menace to the success of my undertaking, and to my safety."

"If that is so, then hire men to do away with him. I will pay."

"It will come high, master; and then they may threaten us with disclosure. Rascals are as numerous in Rome as are grains of sand in the arena, and yet thou wilt hardly believe what reward they ask when a respectable man seeks their services. No, worthy tribune! What if the men are caught red-handed? They will confess, and there will be no end of trouble. I am safe, because my name will remain unknown to them. It is bad that thou dost not believe me, for, not to speak of my conscience, remember that there are two things in the balance: my own skin, and the reward thou hast promised me."

"How much dost thou need?"

"I need a thousand sestertia. Remember that I must find conscientious rascals,—such as would not run away with the money. Good pay for good work! And there must be left something for myself,—for the tears of grief I shall shed over Glaucus. I take the gods to witness how I loved him. If I get a thousand sestertia to-day, in two days his soul will be in Hades, and only there—if souls retain memory and the gift of thought—will he know how I loved him. I shall declare to my men, whom I will find this very day, that for every day that they permit Glaucus to live, I shall cut down a hundred sestertia from their pay. A plan is now forming in my mind, which seems to me infallible."

Vinicius again promised him the money, told him not to speak of Glaucus again, and asked him what other news he brought. Chilo had been to the prayer-houses, had looked the Christians in the face, especially the women, but had seen no one who resembled Lygia. They considered him a man who followed in the footsteps of "Christ," since he gave Euricius the money. He was greatly delighted that one of their great lawgivers, a certain Paul of Tarsus, was in Rome, imprisoned in a dungeon, because of charges made by the Jews. He had resolved to make his acquaintance. He was still more delighted with the information that a high priest of the sect, who had been Christ's disciple, and to whom He had intrusted the government of the entire Christian world, is daily expected in Rome. Every Christian will probably want to see him and hear him expound His teachings. It is intended to hold great meetings, and Chilo would be present; and as it is not difficult to hide one's self in a crowd, he would take Vinicius with him. They would surely then find Lygia. With the re-

moval of Glaucus, there would be no further danger. Of course, the Christians are capable of avenging themselves, but, generally speaking, they were peaceful people.

Chilo here expressed his surprise that he had not seen Christians giving themselves up to license, or poisoning wells and fountains. They did not seem to be enemies of the human race. He had never seen them worship an ass, or eat the flesh of children. He would surely find people among them who would hide away Glaucus for money; but their teaching, so far as he knew, did not encourage crime, but, on the contrary, commands forgiveness of injury.

Vinicius recalled what Pomponia Græcina had said to him, and was gladly listening to Chilo. And though at times he felt a hatred for Lygia, he felt relieved at the thought that her religion excluded murder and debauchery. It appeared to him dimly that it was that mysterious worship of Christ which had dug the abyss that divided Lygia from him, and he began, at the same time, to fear and hate it.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was really necessary for Chilo to remove Glaucus, who though old, was not at all feeble. There was considerable truth in what Chilo told Vinicius. He knew Glaucus had betrayed him, sold him to murderers, deprived him of his family and his worldly goods, and had left him for dead, not in an inn, but in the fields near Miturna. All of which weighed lightly on him; but he had not foreseen the recovery of Glaucus, and his coming to Rome. So that he was really horrified when he saw him at the prayer meeting, and for a moment seriously thought of abandoning the search for Lygia. On the other hand, he feared Vinicius even more. And there was Petronius behind Vinicius; two powerful patricians. Chilo did not hesitate long. He thought that he would rather have enemies among the weak than among the strong; and though he shuddered at the thought of the bloody deed, out of sheer cowardliness, he now found the necessity of killing Glaucus through the aid of other hands unavoidable. At present the question was the choice of people. The plan he mentioned to Vinicius referred to that question. He could easily find people in the wine-

shops, without honor or religion, who would undertake almost any kind of work but he could still easier fall into the hands of such, who, as soon as they scented money, would begin their work on Chilo himself, and taking earnest money, would extort all his money under threat of exposure.

Moreover, Chilo had of late developed an aversion for the horrible creatures that infested the suspicious houses of the Subura, and on the other side of the Tiber. Measuring everything with his own measure, not knowing sufficiently the Christians, nor their teachings, he thought that he would find among them a pliant tool; and as they seemed more conscientious than others, he resolved to go to them, and present the matter in such a light that they would undertake it, not only for the money, but also through devotion.

With this end in view, he went in the evening to Euricius, whom he knew to be devoted to him, and would do anything to help him. But his assumed religion prevented him from disclosing the truth. He wanted to have people who would not shrink from any undertaking, but he would talk to them in a way, that they would, for the sake of their own safety, keep it secret.

After Euricius had redeemed his son, he hired a small store near the Circus Maximus, to sell olives, beans, and water sweetened with honey. Chilo found him bringing things in order, and greeting him in the name of Christ, began to speak of the business that brought him there. Having rendered a service, he hoped that he would be paid with gratitude. He needs two or three men, strong and fearless, to avert great danger that was threatening not only him, but all the Christians. It was true, he was poor, having given all the money he had to Euricius, but he would nevertheless pay those people for their services; with the understanding, however, that they would trust him, and do whatever he commanded.

Euricius and his son, Quartus, were almost on their knees before their benefactor. Both declared their readiness to do whatever he ordered them to, believing that such a holy man would not require them to do anything not consistent with the teachings of Christ.

Chilo assured them that that was the case, and raising his eyes as in prayer, he thought whether he should not make them his victims, and save the thousand sestertia.

But he rejected the idea. Though not so old, Euricius was weighted with grief and sickness. Quartus was only sixteen years old, and Chilo wanted dexterous people, and especially strong ones. As to the thousand sestertia, he reckoned to keep a considerable part of it. They insisted for some time, but as he decidedly refused to avail himself of them, they yielded.

Quartus suggested a laborer who was employed by Demas, the baker, and who was as strong as four ordinary men. Chilo would like to get acquainted with him, provided he was a god-fearing man, and capable of sacrificing himself for his brethren.

"He is a Christian; Demas employs mainly Christians," said Quartus.

Demas's bakery was situated near the Emporium, which is a short way from the Circus Maximus. When Quartus and Chilo reached the colonnade of the Porticus Æmilia, the Greek said to the boy:

"I am old, and at times my memory fails me. Yes! Our Christ was betrayed by one of his disciples, but for the life of me, I cannot at this moment think of his name"—

"Judas; he afterward hanged himself," answered Quartus, who, in his soul, was wondering how that name could possibly be forgotten.

"Ah, yes! Judas! I thank thee."

They finally reached a wooden structure, from the interior of which came the noise of the grinding millstones. Quartus walked in, but Chilo, who did not like to show himself to too many people, and who was constantly in dread of meeting Glaucus, remained on the street.

Chilo was curious about that Hercules. If he is a rascal and a wise man, he would cost him something; but if he is a virtuous Christian and a fool, he would do anything Chilo desired without pay.

Soon Quartus came out of the building with another man, who was only dressed in a tunic called "exomis," and so cut that the right hand and the right side of the breast were exposed. Such dress was chiefly worn by laborers. Chilo sighed from the depth of his breast,—such a breast and such an arm he had never seen before.

"Here is the brother whom thou hadst desire to see," said Quartus.

"May the peace of Christ be with thee!" answered Chilo. "Quartus, tell this brother if he can confide in me,

and then go home in the name of God. It is not proper to leave thy old father in loneliness."

"This is a holy man, who gave all his fortune to my father to obtain my release from slavery, although I am an entire stranger to him," said Quartus. "May our Lord the Saviour prepare him a reward in heaven!"

The gigantic laborer, hearing this, bowed, and kissed the hand of Chilo.

"What is thy name, brother?" asked the Greek.

"At holy baptism, father, the name Urban was given me."

"Urban, my brother, hast thou time to freely talk with me?"

"Our work begins at midnight, and there is now only supper preparing for us."

"Then there is plenty of time. Let us go to the river, there thou wilt hear my words."

On the stone embankment all was quiet, only from afar came the noise of the millstones; and below plashed the river. He looked long into the face of the laborer; and notwithstanding its severe and mournful expression, characteristic of all barbarians living in Rome, it seemed kind and sincere.

"There is a kind and stupid man who will kill Glaucus without any pay," he said to himself, and then asked:

"Urban, dost thou love Christ?"

"I love him with all my heart and soul," answered the laborer.

"And thy brethren and sisters, and those who taught thee truth and faith in Christ?"

"I love them also, father."

"Then may peace be with thee!"

"And with thee, father!"

There was silence again; only from afar thundered the millstones, and the river plashed below.

Chilo stared at the moon, and in a slow, low voice he began to speak of the death of Christ.

He spoke not to Urban, but as if recalling to himself that death, and entrusting its secret to the drowsy city. There was something touching in that, as well as solemn. The laborer wept, and when Chilo began to moan and grieve over the fact, that at the moment of the Saviour's death, there was no one to defend Him, if not from the crucifixion, at least from the insults of the soldiers and the Jews, the

gigantic breast of the barbarian began to heave from grief and suppressed rage. The death of Christ only moved him, but at the thought of that crowd mocking the Lamb, nailed to the cross, his simple soul was filled with emotion, and he was possessed by a wild thirst for revenge.

Suddenly Chilo asked:

"Urban, knowest thou who Judas was?"

"I know, I know! But he hanged himself," exclaimed the laborer.

There was in his voice sorrow that the traitor should have chosen his own punishment instead of getting into his hands. And Chilo continued:

"But if he had not killed himself, and if some one of the Christians were to meet him on land or on sea, would it not be the duty of that Christian to avenge the torture, blood and death of the Saviour?"

"Who would not avenge, father?"

"Peace be with thee, faithful servant of the Lamb? One may forgive his own injury, but who has the right to forgive insults offered to God? But as serpent breeds a serpent; as evil breeds evil, so from the poison of Judas rose another traitor; and as the former betrayed the Saviour to the Roman warriors and the Jews, so the latter, who lives among us, intends to hand his flock over to the wolves. And if no one will forestall the treason, if no one will remove the head of the serpent, destruction awaits us all; and with us will go down the glory of the Lamb."

The laborer looked at him with the greatest alarm, while the Greek covered his head with a corner of his cloak, and began to repeat with a voice coming as if from beneath the earth:

"Woe to you, servants of the true God! Woe to you, Christian men and Christian women!"

Again there was silence. Again were heard the rumbling of the millstones, the song of the millers, and the noise of the river.

"Father," finally asked the laborer, "what kind of traitor is that?"

Chilo hung his head.

"What kind of traitor? A son of Judas, a son of poison, who dissembles a Christian, and goes to houses of prayer only to accuse our brethren before Cæsar of disbelief in his divinity, of poisoning the fountains, killing children, and of conspiring to destroy the city. And in a few

days the pretorians will receive a command to put old men, women and children in chains, and to lead them to death, as were led to death the slaves of Pedanius Secundus. All that is the work of that second Judas. But if no one punished the first Judas, no one took vengeance on him,—if no one defended Christ in the hour of his torment,—who will want to punish this one, who will destroy the serpent before Cæsar hears his report, who will annihilate him, who will ward off the destruction of our brethren and the faith of Christ?"

Urban, who was sitting the while Chilo spoke, suddenly sprung to his feet, and said:

"I will, father."

Chilo also rose, and for a moment looked on the laborer's face, which was lighted up by the moon, then stretched his arm, and slowly dropped his palm on his head.

"Go to the Christians," he said, solemnly, "go to the houses of prayer, get our brethren to point out Glaucus to you; and when they show him to thee, slay him in the name of Christ!"

"Glaucus?" echoed the laborer, as if desiring to fix that name in his memory.

"Dost thou know him?"

"No, I do not. There are a thousand Christians in Rome, and they do not all know each other. But to-morrow night, in Ostrianum, there will gather all the brethren and sisters to hear the great Apostle of Christ, who will teach there; and there the brethren will show me Glaucus."

"In Ostrianum?" asked Chilo. "Beyond the city gates? The brethren and all the sisters? At night? Beyond the gates, in the Ostrianum?"

"Yes, father. That is our cemetery, between Viæ Salaria and Nomentana. Is it not known to thee that the Great Apostle will teach there?"

"I have been away from home two days, and have received no letters; besides, I did not know where Ostrianum is, because I but lately arrived from Corinth, where I am organizing a Christian community. And so if Christ has inspired thee, thou, my son, wilt go at night to Ostrianum, wilt find Glaucus, and wilt slay him on thy return to the city; for which thy sins will be forgiven thee. And now, peace be with thee!"

"I listen to thee, servant of the Lamb." The countenance of the laborer showed confusion. He had lately

killed a man, perhaps two, and the teaching of Christ forbids killing. He killed them not in his own defense, but even that is forbidden. The bishop gave him some brethren to assist him, but did not command him to kill; and he killed only accidentally, because God had cursed him with too much strength. And now he is repenting. Others sing behind their grindstones; while he, unfortunate man, is thinking of his sin, and his offense against the Lamb. How he wept, how he prayed, how he implored the Lamb! And he still feels that he has not repented enough. But now he again promised to kill a traitor,—and it is well! One's own injuries only may be forgiven. He will kill him, even in the presence of all brethren and sisters, but let Glaucus first be condemned by the elders, bishops, and the apostle. To kill is a small affair; it is even pleasant to kill a traitor, like a wolf or a bear. But what if Glaucus should suffer innocently? How take upon one's conscience a new murder, a new sin, and a new offense against the Lamb?

"There is no time for a trial, my son," answered Chilo, "because the traitor will go direct from the Ostrianum to Antium to report to Cæsar, and will conceal himself in the house of a certain patrician, whom he is serving. But I will give thee a sign; if, after killing Glaucus, thou show it, the bishop and the Great Apostle will bless thy deed."

He drew a knife from his belt, took out a sestertium, and cutting on it the sign of a cross, gave it to the laborer.

"Here is the sentence of Glaucus, and thy sign. When, after the killing, thou show it to the bishop, he will forgive thy former killing."

The laborer stretched his hand for the coin, but the memory of the first murder was too fresh in his mind, and he felt a kind of dread.

"Father," said he, almost in a supplicating voice, "dost thou take it in thy own conscience, and hast thou thyself heard him betray his brethren?"

Chilo felt the necessity of producing some proofs, give some names, to prevent suspicion creeping into the giant's heart.

"Listen, Urban," said he, "I live in Corinth, but I came from Kos, and here, in Rome, I am enlightening a girl from the country, called Eunice, in the teachings of Christ. She is serving as *vestiplica* in the house of Cæsar's friend, a certain Petronius. And in that house I heard that Glaucus

has undertaken to betray all the Christians; and has, besides, promised another confidant of Cæsar, Vinicius, that he will find a certain Christian girl"—

He stopped suddenly, and looked with amazement on the laborer, whose eyes lighted up like those of a beast, and the face assumed an expression of wild rage and threat.

"What is the matter with thee?" he asked in terror.

"Nothing, father,—to-morrow I will kill Glaucus."

The Greek became silent, but after awhile, he took the laborer by the shoulders and turned him so that the moonlight fell straight on his face, and began looking intently into his face. It was seen that he did not know whether to question him further, and bring out everything to the surface, or to contend with what he had already learned.

But the inborn caution of Chilo prevailed. He sighed deeply, then placed his hand on the head of the laborer, and asked in a solemn voice:

"So in holy baptism the name Urban was given thee?"

"Yes, father."

"Then, peace be with thee, Urban!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

PETRONIUS TO VINICIUS:

"Thine is a sad case, carissime. There is no doubt that our Lady of Love has ruffled thy peace. Thou, evidently, canst think of naught besides love, and hast lost entirely thy reason. When it is convenient to thee peruse thy letter to me, and thou wilt discover how oblivious thou art to all save Lygia; how thy mind reverts always to the same subject, and perpetually hovers about it, as a bird of pray continually wheels about its intended victim. By Pollux! if thou dost not discover her soon, thou wilt become a veritable Sphinx, or, at least, that part of thee which the flame of love has not entirely consumed; like that Sphinx, so madly in love with Isis, who became unmindful of all else, and only lived for the coming of night, to gaze at the adored one.

"In the evenings disguise thyself, and pass through the city; visit with Chilo the Christian meeting places, for the hope which pursuit gives will do thee good. But take this advice, as thou lovest me:—Hire this Croton, and go

ye three in company, for safety. Ursus, the servant of Lygia, it would appear is possessed of marvelous strength. Since Pomponia and Lygia are members of this Christian community, I cannot think it is so vile as has been given out; but, as was seen in the rescue of Lygia, they will protect the young of their flock. I know that when thou discoverst Lygia, thou wilt be unable to restrain thy impulse to seize her, and with no help but Chilo's, how wilt thou succeed? Croton is well able to defend himself against ten such men as Ursus. Be liberal with Croton, but let not Chilo rob thee, is the best advice I can give. The child Augusta is no more mentioned, except occasionally by Poppæa, nor do they say aught about witchcraft. Cæsar is wholly occupied with other things. Moreover, if there be truth in the report that the condition of Poppæa is again a subject of interest, the remembrance of that infant will completely pass away.

"It is some days since we came to Baia, which news must have reached thee, if thou canst heed any news. When the divine Cæsar came here first, he was oppressed by conscience at the remembrance of his mother. But, think thee what Ahenobarbus has suggested; even this: to make his mother's murder a subject for his verses, and for foolish tragic scenes. Beforetime, he felt genuine reproaches, only because he was afraid, but now when he feels himself secure and is sure that no vengeance is pursuing him, he seeks to attract notice by feigning them. Sometimes, at night, he starts up, and rouses us, declaring that he is being pursued by the Furies; he glances around him and copies the attitudes of an actor interpreting Orestes, and very vilely too. He recites to us Greek verses, and looks around to see what admiration he evokes. We feign to admire, and assume the same tragic tone, to protect him from the Furies; instead of saying, 'Go to sleep, thou fool.' But, by Castor! at the very least, thou must have heard that he appeared in public in Naples. All the Greek rabble from the city and neighboring towns were driven in, and they filled the arena with such a disgusting stench of sweat and garlic, that I thanked the gods I was behind the scenes with Ahenobarbus, instead of being in the front seats with the rest of the Augustians. Thou wilt hardly believe, how actual his fear was when the time came for him to appear. He put my hand to his heart, which beat with violence, and he panted and became pale, while beads of

cold perspiration broke out on his forehead. But there were pretorians armed with clubs in every row of seats to insure applause. They were not necessary though, for no troop of monkeys ever raised such noises as these ruffians. The odor of garlic pervaded the place, but Nero bowed, placed his hand on his heart, blew kisses to them and wept. Then he rushed, as though drunk behind the scenes crying to us: 'Were the triumphs of Julius aught to compare with this of mine?' And still the crowd yelled and cheered, well knowing that such applause would win them favors, feasts, presents, lottery tickets and another grand exhibition. I marvel not at their applause, for truly, nothing so remarkable has ever been seen before. And still Nero repeated: 'See what the Greeks are! See what the Greeks are!' and since that night I have noticed that he hates Rome more and more. Special messengers were sent to Rome to announce the Imperial triumph and it is expected that the Senate will some time express its thanks. A peculiar thing occurred directly after this first performance of Nero's. Just after the departure of the people, the theatre suddenly collapsed. Not one body did I see, though, taken from the ruins. There are many, including Greeks even, that argue this to be a sign of the anger of the gods at the unseemly lack of dignity in a Cæsar: but he argues otherwise, that the gods are pleased with his song, and have taken those who came to hear it under their divine care. And so, thanks and offerings are made in all the temples. Nero is now encouraged to go to Achæa. A little while ago, he said, however, that he feared the Romans, because of their love for him, might revolt against this absence.

"We shall see at Beneventum the show promised by Vatinus; then we shall proceed to Greece and make of it a sort of triumphal procession, with women attired in the skins of tigers to draw the chariots, where sit crowned bacchantes or nymphs; there will be music, poetry, flowers and all the delights of an oriental dream. He would blot Rome from his memory; would live as do the gods; floating along the Archipelago, as Apollo, Osiris and Baal combined in golden galleys with purple sail; to be all things at all times. And even I, who have common sense enough, and judgment, have permitted myself to be carried away by these fancies, because, even if impossible, they are at least out of the ordinary. Life in itself is

empty, and at times ugly enough, except when a Lygia or a Eunice transforms it, or art makes it beautiful. Nero's expectations however will never be realized, because he makes no place for servility, treachery, and death, which must necessarily accompany this miserable buffoon and tyrannous fool. Death is the fate of whomever so displeases him. Poor Torquatus Silanus met his a few days ago, and Thræsea will follow soon because he is too honest. Tigellinus has not yet accomplished mine, because yet, Cæsar has need of me to help with my taste and advice the arranging of this journey to Achæa. But I often think that in the end, I will finish by opening my veins. When that time comes, I shall think upon my goblet,—the one thou dost so admire; my concern would be that it should never be possessed by Nero. If thou art near, I will give it to thee, if not, I will shatter it.

“Farewell! Hire Croton if thou dost not wish Lygia to be taken from thee again. Send me Chilo as soon as thou hast no further use for him, wherever I am. Perhaps I may help him to become another Vatinius and see senators and consuls fear his frown. I should wish to live to see such a sight. Inform me when thy search is rewarded so I may make an offering for ye both in Venus's temple. I dreamed once of seeing Lygia on thy knee seeking thy caress. Make the dream a true one. May thy sky be free from clouds or only such clouds as are rosy-tinted, and may thy health be perfect. Farewell.”

CHAPTER XIX.

SCARCELY had Vinicius finished reading when Chilo came in and announced that he had found out that Ursus is working near the Emporium for a miller named Demas; that Lygia, too, must be in Rome, since Ursus is there; and that she would be at Ostrianum that same night. As Vinicius did not know where Ostrianum was, he explained to him that Ostrianum is an old hypogeum between the Viæ Salaria and Nomentana which the Christians used as a meeting place and where, as Ursus said, all the Christians would congregate that night to hear the apostle Peter. Lygia, who was then under the care of Ursus and the Christian elders, would surely be there.

Vinicius on hearing this, became excited with the thought of seeing, and perhaps seizing, his beloved Lygia, requested Chilo to go with him to Ostrianum, to which the latter was not inclined. But after Vinicius had given him a purse filled with "scrupula" and promised to give him another filled with great aurei in case he found Lygia there, he consented to go. Still he advised Vinicius not to take along his slaves, not to carry Lygia off directly from Ostrianum. They ought to go there with hoods on their heads, with their faces hidden, and look on at all from some dark corner. It would be safest, he thought, to follow Lygia at a distance, to see what house she entered in, surround it next morning at daybreak, and take her thence in open daylight. Since she was a hostage and belonged specially to Cæsar, they might do that without fear of the law. If they did not find her there they might follow Ursus, and the result would be the same. But Vinicius and himself should arm.

Vinicius saw the perfect truth of what he had said and, recalling Petronius's council, commanded his slaves to bring Croton. Chilo, who knew every one in Rome, was set at rest on hearing the name of the famous athlete, whose superhuman strength in the arena he had wondered at many a time.

After Chilo enjoyed a hearty meal in the house of Vinicius, and after he found out the password of the Christians, Croton came, stipulated as to the price of the trip and, after a short conversation, they were ready to go.

"By Hercules!" Croton exclaimed, "it is well, lord, that thou hast sent for me, since I shall start to-morrow for Beneventum, whither the noble Vatinius has summoned me to make a trial, in the presence of Cæsar, of a certain syphax, the most powerful Negro that Africa has ever produced. Dost thou imagine, lord, how his spinal column will crack in my arms, or how I shall break his black jaw with my fist?"

"By Pollux, Croton, I am sure that thou wilt do that," answered Vinicius.

And they departed. They quickly reached the place, and beheld Ostrianum. Vinicius's heart began to beat now with more vigor. At the gate two quarrymen took the signs from them. In a moment Vinicius and his attendants were in a rather spacious place enclosed on all sides by a wall. Here and there were separate monuments, and in the

centre was the entrance to the hypogeum itself, or crypt. In the lower part of the crypt, beneath the earth, were graves; before the entrance a fountain was playing.

As far as the eye could reach, lantern gleamed after lantern, but many of those who came had no light whatever. With the exception of a few uncovered heads, all were hooded from fear of treason or cold. After a short time, the ceremony began. A certain strange hymn was sung. After a while an old man, wearing a hooded mantle, but with a bare head, issued from the hypogeum.

"This is he—the foremost disciple of Christ—a fisherman," Chilo whispered to Vinicius.

Peter began to speak, and he spoke at first like a father instructing his children and teaching them how to live. He enjoined on them to renounce excess and luxury, to love poverty, purity of life, and truth, to endure wrongs and persecutions patiently, to obey the government, and those placed above them; to guard against treason, deceit, and calumny; and finally, to give an example in their own society to each other, and even to pagans. Vinicius listened to him attentively, and could not explain to himself what all that really meant. "Renouncement on earth of all pleasures, and a life in heaven after death—what did it mean?" But here Chilo whispered in his ear:

"Lord, I see Urban over there, near the old man,—and with him a maiden."

CHAPTER XX.

VINICIUS quivered with excitement at sight of Lygia. Everything else was forgotten by him the moment he saw her. To think that he had really found her at last. His joy was so great that he feared it might kill him. He asked himself if he were not dreaming. Was this merely the continuation of those miracles he had seen and heard so much of? No, there could be no room for doubt, since but a few steps divided him from her. The light fell full upon her, revealing to him all the grace and beauty of her form. The hood having fallen from her head revealed her disheveled hair, her mouth was parted slightly, and her eyes raised to the Apostle, delight plainly pictured on her face. She was dressed like a daughter of the people, but to Vini-

cious she had never appeared more beautiful. Though attired almost as a slave he could not help noticing her truly patrician head. Love took possession of all his senses. He felt a new sensation of pleasure in her presence. She seemed almost a child beside the tall and powerful Lygian. He observed also that she had grown more slender. She looked more ethereal. She gave him the impression of some beautiful flower, some living spiritual being. His desire to possess her grew stronger at sight of her. He had never seen any woman, either in Rome or the Orient, more beautiful. He felt he could give up all for her,—Rome, the world, life itself and all it held most dear to him.

Had it not been for Chilo who pulled at the corner of his mantle, he might by his desire to gaze on Lygia have exposed them both to danger. In the meantime the Christians began praying and singing. Those whom the presbyters now presented as being ready for baptism the Great Apostle baptized with water from the fountain. It seemed to Vinicius as if that night would never have an ending. His thought now was to follow Lygia as quickly as possible, and forcibly seize her on the way or at her house.

As some of the party were leaving the cemetery, Chilo whispered to Vinicius,—

“People look at us, lord, let us go out before the gate.”

This was so, since during the Apostle’s discourse, they had not removed their hoods as the others had done, thus attracting attention.

They stood before the gate where they could see those who passed. By his great stature it was easy to recognize Ursus.

“Let us follow,” said Chilo. “To-morrow, if not to day, thy slaves can surround the house and carry her off.”

“No,” said Vinicius.

“What then, lord?”

“If thou hast sufficient courage to undertake the task, Croton, let us follow her to the house and take her now.”

“My courage is equal to the task, and if I do not succeed in breaking the back of that Lygian bull who guards her, thou canst have me for thy slave.”

But Chilo endeavored to dissuade them against taking this step. It was too much like exposing themselves to death, and if she should escape them their task of finding her again would be all the greater. She might even leave

Rome. Then the search would be almost fruitless. No, it was better not to act till certain of success.

Vinicius who was for instant and forcible seizure of Lygia, regardless of all risk, could not help feeling that the Greek was right. To Croton, however, the question was one of reward, and his counsel prevailed with Vinicius whose heart was in the undertaking.

"I do not advise taking the girl from the crowd at this moment, for they might intercept our path with stones placed in our way; but allow her to go home where I will seize her, and take her to whatsoever place thou wishest."

"Be it so, by Hercules!" said Vinicius. "To-morrow we may not find her there."

"This Ursus has enormous strength," urged Chilo.

"Thou shalt not be required to hold his hands," said Croton, contemptuously. "Once at an inn I was fallen upon by seven drunken gladiators. My word for it none of them escaped whose ribs did not attest the punishment inflicted by these fists."

They waited long, since it was almost dawn before they saw Ursus advance through the gate accompanied by Lygia. With them were several persons. Chilo thought he recognized the Great Apostle; beside him walked an old man, much smaller in stature, two women, and a boy who carried a lantern. Then followed a large crowd, probably numbering two hundred persons. Vinicius and his two companions walked with these latter.

"See, lord," said Chilo, "under what powerful protection thy maiden is placed. That must be the Great Apostle since those who pass kneel to him."

But Vinicius saw only Lygia. In his mind he was carefully revolving his plans for her seizure. He felt that he was taking a hazardous step, and one that called for bold and determined action to ensure success.

The way being long, he had also time for a different train of reflection. He thought of the gulf that this strange religion of hers had opened up between them, and understood now many things that were incomprehensible to him before. He had not known Lygia till now. He felt now that it was the influence of that religion which had made her so unlike other women, and was ready to acknowledge its strange power over him. He knew, too, how vain and worthless to such a nature as hers were the offerings he had been prepared to make on the altar of his love only to have hers in

return. Neither he nor Petronius had been able to see this before. He knew now that Lygia, even if she loved him, would never sacrifice a single Christian truth for the sake of his love, and that her pleasure was altogether unlike that which the rest of Rome were pursuing. He might make of any other woman he knew his mistress; she would be nothing more to him than his victim. To carry her off seemed possible, but when he had accomplished this what had he gained? He could not say he had her love. A soldier, he believed in the power of the sword which had brought the rest of the world to the feet of Rome, but for the first time in his life he now recognized a superior power. He asked himself what it was. He was unable to answer.

When he thought of all he had seen, and sought within himself for an explanation, his thoughts became confused, and left him bewildered. Chilo's lamentations brought him back to himself. He had undertaken to find Lygia. At peril of his own life he had pointed her out to Vinicius. What more did they want of him? He had not undertaken to carry her away. Besides, what could they expect of an old man whose life was devoted to science, virtue, and to meditation? And what would happen were Vinicius to meet with a mishap? The gods do not always watch over their own, and what was to prevent blind Fortune, that did not see too well by daylight, from playing the noble Vinicius a scurvy trick in the dark. If that Lygian bear should do bodily harm to Vinicius, what would happen to him, poor Chilo? Instead of a reward what blame might not fall upon his hapless head. He regarded himself as standing in the same relation to Vinicius as Aristotle to Alexander of Macedonia. If the noble Vinicius would only give him the purse he had seen him place in his girdle before leaving home, he would at least have something that would aid him in case of need. If Vinicius would only listen to his counsel, the counsel of an old man of experience, and a sage, too, all would be well.

Vinicius, taking the purse from his girdle, threw it to Chilo, saying, "there; be thou silent!"

The purse was very heavy, and the Greek's confidence was somewhat restored when he felt it.

"It comforts me to remember that Hercules and Theseus accomplished greater things, but is not my dear good friend Croton, Hercules himself? Thou, my noble lord, art not a demi-god, thou art a god who will always remember thy

faithful servant. Once in a while, thou wilt supply his wants, for when deep in his studies he can think of naught besides; a little house standing in its small garden, having a tiny portico for coolness in the summer time, would be a gift worthy of such a benefactor. In the meantime, I shall watch thy prowess from a distance, and pray Jove to protect thee. If it be necessary I will draw half Rome to thy aid by my cries. What a miserable road! the oil is all burned; Croton, whose magnanimity equals his strength, would learn two things did he but carry me to the gate; first, if he can easily carry the maiden, and secondly, how to win the favor of the gods, as did Æneas by an act of greatness."

"I would sooner carry a sheep that had been a month dead from mange," replied Croton; "but give to me the purse the noble tribune gave thee, and I will do so."

"Mayst thou lose thy great toe," answered Chilo. "What benefit dost thou receive from the teaching of that good old man, who placed poverty and charity amongst the greatest virtues? Thou wilt never make even a poor Christian; the sun can more easily penetrate the Mamertine prison walls than truth enter thy hippopotamus skull."

"There is no fear of my becoming a Christian," remarked Croton. "I have no desire to lose my bread."

"If thou wert ever so little of a philosopher thou wouldst know that riches are but vanity."

"Cast thy philosophy at me, and I will give thee a blow in the stomach with my head. We shall see then, which is the better."

"An ox might have replied so to Aristotle," Chilo answered, angrily.

The grey dawn began now to faintly outshadow the surrounding objects, and the road took on a less deserted appearance. Market carts filled with game, asses and mules conveying vegetables, were frequently met with. A light mist arose from the earth promising fair weather, and giving to men and women a little distance away a ghostly appearance. Vinicius watched the slender figure of Lygia become more silvery with the growing light.

"It would be an offence in me, lord," remarked Chilo, "to anticipate the end of thy generosity; but thou wilt not accuse me of self-interest only, since thou hast paid me already, if I again entreat thee to return for thy slaves and a litter when we have ascertained the house where the maiden

dwells. Pay no heed to the elephantine Croton, who only advises to carry off the maiden now, in order to squeeze thy purse dry."

"I owe thee a stroke of the fist between the shoulders," said Croton; "which means that thou art lost."

"And I have a cask of wine of Cephalonia; which means 'Not so,'" replied Chilo.

Vinicius paid no attention to their words. He was observing the strange thing that happened as they neared the gate. As the Apostle Peter passed through, two soldiers knelt. He placed his hand for an instant on their helmets, and made the sign of the cross. The young tribune had never before thought of the possibility of there being Christians among the soldiers. In his amazement he likened this new religion to a burning city, embracing more and more persons of every condition, as the flames encircle more and more the buildings, until all are gathered in. He thought, too, with regard to Lygia, that if she wished to escape from the city, there might be found guards who would not hinder her flight. Then he felt thankful this had not happened.

After awhile the Christians began to disperse, so, in order to avoid notice, it was necessary to follow at a greater distance. The cowardly Chilo commenced to lag further and further behind, making excuse of wounds and pains in his legs. Vinicius did not mind this, thinking they would do just as well without him; he would indeed have allowed him to go off altogether. The philosophic Greek was too much pressed by curiosity, however, to depart entirely. He continued to urge his previous advice; he fancied moreover that perhaps the old man walking with Peter, might be Glaucus, except he were too short.

They continued for some distance before the Trans-Tiber was reached, and it was getting near sunrise when the group broke up. The old woman and boy accompanied by the Apostle went up the river while Lygia with the other old man and Ursus entered a narrow alley, and, about a hundred yards further up went into a house, containing two shops, one where olives were sold, and the other, a poultry shop.

Chilo, who was following some distance behind Vinicius and Croton, stopped suddenly, pressing close up to the wall and hissed to them to go back. This they did, in order to consult with each other.

"Run, Chilo," said Vinicius, "and see if this house faces on another street."

Chilo, in spite of his wounded feet, ran like Mercury, and as quickly returned.

"No," said he, "this is the only entrance."

Then, clasping his hands, he exclaimed,

"Lord! I beseech thee, by Apollo, Jupiter and all the other gods to give up this plan. Listen to me"—

But he ceased at once, on seeing the face of Vinicius which had grown pale with emotion, while his eyes glared like those of a wild beast. One look sufficed to show him that nothing in the whole world would dissuade him from the task he had undertaken. Croton began to inhale deep breaths, and sway his heavy head from side to side, like a caged bear; but there was not the slightest symptom of fear discernible on his face.

"I will enter first," said he.

"No! thou wilt follow me," commanded Vinicius.

Shortly after, they disappeared in the entrance. Chilo ran to the corner of the next alley, and from behind it watched to see what would take place.

CHAPTER XXI.

NOT until he was inside, did Vinicius realize how great was the task he had set himself. The house was several stories high, like many other Roman houses built for rent; and built in such haste, and so insecurely that they often gave way over the heads of their occupants. They were veritable human hives, full of small rooms, inhabited by swarms of poor people. These houses were numberless, as the streets were often nameless; the rents were gathered by the slaves of the owners, and as the government of the city did not require the names of the tenants, these were generally unknown to their landlords. In this way, it was almost impossible to find any particular person in such a house.

Vinicius and Croton came to a small court with a fountain in the middle, which formed a sort of atrium common to all the house. In each of the four walls were galleries, led up to by stairways of stone or wood, and from these were the openings to lodgings. Some lodgings were on the

ground; some had wooden doors; while others only had woollen screens, and these generally much dilapidated.

It was still early, and no one was in the court. Evidently, all slept except those who had come from Ostri-
anum.

"What must we do, lord?" said Croton, stopping suddenly.

"We must stay here," replied Vinicius. "Some one may come, and we must not be seen."

Just then it seemed to Vinicius that Chilo's plan had been a good one. If he had had many slaves with him then, it would have been an easy matter to have rushed in and searched all the lodgings, whilst they kept the entrance. As it was, he was afraid to ask for her, lest suspicion be aroused, and Lygia be warned. Vinicius pondered a moment as to the advisability of returning for his slaves, when just at that moment, appeared from behind one of the screens, a man carrying a sieve, who came toward the fountain. Vinicius saw at a glance that it was Ursus.

"This is the Lygian!" whispered he to Croton.

"Shall I break his bones now?"

"Not yet."

As the two were hidden in the shadow of the passageway, they were unseen by Ursus, who began quietly to wash the vegetables in his sieve. When he had finished he again disappeared behind the screen, followed by Croton and Vinicius, who expected to come directly into the lodging of Lygia. To their amazement, they found that, instead of a lodging, the screen only hid another passage leading into a small garden where grew a few cypresses and myrtles. Standing beside the wall of another stone building was a very small house.

Both men saw that this, to them, was an advantage. They would be able quickly to overcome Ursus and gain the street with Lygia, without the risk of rousing the tenants of the larger house. Once in the street, it was not likely that any one would try to hinder them, but if they did, Vinicius would make himself known to the guards, and summon their aid in arresting the escape of a hostage of Cæsar.

Ursus was about to enter the house when he heard steps behind him. He turned, and perceiving them, put down his sieve on the balustrade, inquiring:

"What want ye here?"

"Thee!" replied Vinicius. And, turning to Croton, whispered hurriedly,—

"Kill!"

Croton rushed like a tiger on him, and in an instant, before the Lygian had time to perceive who they were, he was in the powerful clasp of Croton.

Vinicius did not wait to see the end of the conflict, feeling confident of the strength of his man. He rushed to the house, pushed open the door, and entered a room lit only by a fire burning in the chimney. The light fell directly on Lygia's face, and on that of an old man, the same who was with them on the road from Ostrianum.

Vinicius entered suddenly, seized Lygia, and rushed back to the door with her. The old man tried to bar the way, but Vinicius held her tightly in one arm, while with the other he removed him from his path. As he did so the hood slipped from his head, disclosing the strained features to Lygia, who now recognized her assailant. Fear turned her blood cold and rendered her speechless; she tried to call for aid, but no words came; tried to grasp the door, but she was powerless. She was well-nigh unconscious, when Vinicius reached the garden, but was called back to her senses by the fearful sight which met her eyes. In the arms of Ursus was a man completely doubled back, with head limp. On perceiving them, Ursus struck one more blow, then rushed at Vinicius like a fury.

"I am a dead man," thought Vinicius.

Then, like a far-off sound, came to his ears the shriek of Lygia "Kill not." He felt the arms which clasped her parted by some terrible power, and the next moment earth and sky faded from his sight.

* * * * *

Chilo, with mingled fear and curiosity, had hidden himself behind an angle outside. He intended to keep near Vinicius, if he were successful in seizing Lygia. He had no longer any fear of Urban, for he counted upon Croton killing him. The streets were still deserted, but he had concluded, in case the resistance of the Christians should draw a crowd, to address them as one armed with authority by Cæsar and call the guard to the assistance of the young tribune. In this way he would gain further reward. He did not yet approve of Vinicius's plan, though with Croton's great strength it might succeed. He watched the entrance

for some time, but all remained quiet, and finally weariness gave place to alarm.

"If they do not find her hiding place, and make any commotion, she will easily take alarm." But he was not displeased at the thought, for then Vinicius would have further use for him, and he would be able to draw a further supply from his generous purse.

"Whatever happens," thought he, "will benefit me, though no one supposes it. O gods! only let me"—

He stopped abruptly, for he fancied that some one was leaning forward to see through the entrance. He pressed close to the wall, to watch, holding his breath. Nor was he mistaken, for after a while a head was half thrust out, but after a hurried glance around was quickly withdrawn.

"That must be either Croton or Vinicius," he thought, "but why are they not coming, and why is it that the girl does not scream? The city will be awake before they can gain the Carinæ. By the immortal gods"— He beheld a sight which made his hair stand on end. Ursus, carrying the body of Croton, appeared in the entrance. He glanced rapidly down the still deserted street, then ran quickly in the direction of the river. Chilo flattened himself against the wall, murmuring: "If he sees me I am undone!"

Ursus, however, quickly disappeared past the corner and Chilo, shivering with fear ran across the street in an opposite direction, with an agility, that might have roused the envy of a younger man.

"If he discovers me when he comes back he will kill me," thought Chilo. He called upon all the gods he knew to help him, and thinking that perhaps the Christians' God had killed Croton, he called upon Him too, promising to leave Rome and molest no further these people. At this moment he believed in all gods and all religions. He did not slacken his pace until he had put some distance between himself and the corner where he had seen Ursus disappear. Some workmen were approaching, so he sat down on the steps of a house to recover breath and wipe the sweat from his face.

"I am getting old and need to keep calm."

The workmen turned into a side street, and again all around was quiet. No one yet stirred in this part of the city, which was occupied by the poor, but free part of the community. In the richer parts, slaves were astir earlier, and were about their occupations.

Chilo remained seated for some little time, until he felt bitterly cold, when he arose, and assuring himself that he still had the purse given him by Vinicius turned again in the direction of the river.

"Perhaps I may see the body of Croton somewhere about," thought he. "How much money that Lygian might gain in a year, for no one is able to withstand such a man. They would give him his weight in gold for every exhibition he gave. But I want no dealings at all with him. What am I to do in this business? If he has broken the bones of Croton, there is no doubt that the soul of Vinicius is hovering around waiting for the burial of his body. But, by Castor; he is a tribune, patrician, and a friend of Cæsar. Terrible revenge would be taken for his death. Suppose I inform the guard now?"— He paused, then continued:

"Alas! I conducted him thither, and his household know it, some of them know too for what purpose. If I am suspected of doing so in order that he might meet his death, what will become of me? Even if, at the trial it be proved that I did not seek his death, it will avail me little, for he is a patrician, and punishment will assuredly overtake me. If I go quietly away from here it will make the matter seem still worse."

Chilo was certainly in a predicament, and did not know which evil to choose. He felt that Rome, great as it was, was now too small for him. Another, might have acquainted the authorities of what had happened, and felt more easy about the results. But with Chilo it was different. His past would make it exceedingly inconvenient to be brought into closer communication with the city prefect, and suspicions might arise in the minds of those in authority, which it might not be impossible to confirm. Then again, Petronius would believe that the death of Vinicius was the result of a plot of which Chilo was not innocent, if he were to flee from Rome. Petronius had great influence, and would certainly push it to its extreme limit in finding and punishing those who were guilty. But, this was the plan that commended itself most to the mind of Chilo—to go himself to Petronius, and acquaint him with all, for Petronius, at least, would hear him calmly, and Petronius knew the commencement of the whole business, so would more readily believe Chilo's innocence than any other person. In order to do so, however, he must first find out for a certainty

what had become of Vinicius. He knew that Croton was killed, and that Ursus had taken his body to the river, but he knew nothing of Vinicius; he might be killed or he might only be wounded; or he might be a temporary prisoner in the hands of the Christians. Then, for the first time, the thought struck him, that he was too well known, too powerful for the Christians to risk drawing upon themselves such a persecution as would follow the doing away of Vinicius. No; it was only temporary detention, until Lygia should have found another refuge. This thought comforted Chilo.

"Yes; he is not dead, unless at the first assault, Ursus tore him limb from limb; and if he is alive, he will prove that there was no treachery on my part, and I shall not only be safe, but—I will offer two heifers to Hermes—be further employed. I will tell one of his freedmen, where he may be found and let him take such steps to rescue him as he may please, but I need not show myself to the prefect. I will go also to Petronius—he will reward me. I found Lygia, now I shall find Vinicius, and after that, Lygia a second time. I must first ascertain if Vinicius be alive."

His present thought was to visit Demas, the baker, in the night, and learn something about Ursus. But he wished to have nothing to do with Ursus. If Glaucus had not met his fate at the hands of Ursus, it was because the Christian elder to whom Chilo had confessed his scheme had warned him. A shiver ran through his whole frame at the bare thought of Ursus. He was very weary, and needed to refresh himself with food, sleep, and a bath. When evening came, he would ask Euricius to go to the house and learn what had happened. He found great comfort in the recollection of the two purses given to him by Vinicius. After all he had undergone, he would eat a hearty meal, and refresh himself with better wine than he could drink every day. This resolution he kept so well when the wine-shops were opened, that he was too sleepy to remember to bathe. He made his way with faltering steps to the house in the Subura where he dwelt, and where the slave woman, whom he had lately purchased, awaited him. He flung himself on the bed in his sleeping-room, and instantly fell into a sound slumber.

He was awakened in the evening by his slave who informed him that some one was clamoring to see him on a pressing matter. He was fully aroused in a moment, and

had wrapped himself in his cloak and hood. Pushing the slave aside, he looked cautiously, and was dumbfounded to see standing before his door the powerful frame of Ursus.

His heart ceased beating, and an icy chill seized him at the sight. When at last he was able to speak, with chattering teeth he said,—

“I am not in, Syra—I know not—that good man”—

“I said thou wert home, but sleeping, lord; and he bid me awake thee.”

“By the gods! I will order thee”—

Just then Ursus, tired of waiting, came nearer to the door, and stooping down, put his head inside.

“O Chilo Chilonides!” he said.

“Pax tecum! pax! pax!” replied he; “best of Christians! I am Chilo; but there is some mistake;—I do not know thee!”

“Chilo Chilonides,” repeated Ursus, “thy master, Vini-
cius, bids thee to go with me to him.”

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

VINICIUS was roused by a keen pain. At first he could not understand where he was, or what was happening. There was a roaring in his head, and his eyes were hazed. But consciousness steadily returned to him and he beheld, as through a mist, three persons bending over him. Two of them he recognized: Ursus, and the old man he had pushed aside while carrying off Lygia. The third, an utter stranger, was holding his left arm and feeling it from the wrist up to the shoulder-blade, which pained Vinicius so terribly that, considering some peculiar sort of revenge they were taking of him, he clenched his teeth and cried out: "Kill me!" But they, apparently, paid no attention to his words, as if they did not hear them, or thought them the usual groans of suffering. Ursus, with his anxious and also threatening face of a barbarian, held a bundle of white linen strips. The old man spoke to the person who was pressing the arm of Vinicius:

"Art thou convinced, Glaucus, that the wound in the head is not mortal?"

"Yes, honorable Crispus," replied Glaucus; "while serving as a slave in the fleet, and while living afterward at Naples, I cured many wounds, and with the profits of my calling freed at last myself and my family. The wound in the head is not dangerous. When that man (here he pointed with his head to Ursus) took the girl from the young man, he pushed him against the wall; the young man while falling put out his arm, evidently to save himself, and disjoined it, but thereby saved his head and his life."

"Many of the brotherhood were benefited by thy occupation," replied Crispus, "thou art known as a good physician; therefore I sent Ursus to call thee."

"Ursus who confessed on the road that yesterday he was ready to kill me."

"He had confessed his intention to me earlier than to thee,—but I, knowing thee, and thy love of Christ, explained to him that the traitor is not thou, but the unknown who tried to persuade him to murder."

"That was an evil spirit, but I took him for an angel," replied Ursus, with a sigh.

"Some other time thou wilt tell me," said Glaucus, "now we must care for the sick man." And saying this he began to set the arm. Vinicius, though Ursus sprinkled water on his face, fainted repeatedly from intense suffering; this, however, was a fortunate circumstance, since he did not feel the pain of setting the arm. Glaucus fixed the limb between two strips of wood, so as to keep the arm motionless. When the operation was over, Vinicius regained consciousness, and saw Lygia standing by his bed. She stood holding in her hands a brass basin filled with water in which Glaucus dipped, from time to time, a sponge, to cool and freshen his head.

Vinicius looked on, not trusting his own eyes. It seemed to him that the beloved being he saw was but the creation of a feverish dream. Some time passed before he could collect strength enough to whisper:

"Lygia."

At the sound of his voice the basin in her hand began to tremble. She looked at him with eyes full of sadness.

"Peace be with thee!" she answered in a low voice.

He looked at her as if wishing to sate his eyes with her appearance, and that, on closing them again, they should vividly retain the image of her beloved form. He looked at her face that was thinner and more wan than ever; at her dark curls, on the poor dress of a working woman; and he looked so intently that her snow-white forehead began to grow rosy under the influence of his glance. He thought that he was still in love with her, that he was the cause of her wanness and sadness, and that no other than he took her away from the house in which she had been beloved, and surrounded with comfort and pleasure. He compelled her to seek shelter in that squalid house and to put on that poor garment woven of dark wool. And nevertheless he wished with all the might of his soul to clothe her in the costliest stuffs, and to deck her with costliest jewels of the earth. He grew so faint with strong emotion, pity and sorrow, that he would have fallen to her feet if he only could move.

"Lygia," he said, "thou hast not permitted to kill me."

She softly replied: "May God restore thy health."

To Vinicius, who was conscious of the wrongs he had done her, and of the wrongs he intended to do, her words

were like a healing balm. He forgot at that moment that the Christian faith might be speaking through her lips. He only felt that his adored woman was speaking, and that answer, full of care for him and superhuman goodness, touched him to the core of his heart. As before with pain so now he grew weak with excitement. He relapsed into a faintness, endless and at the same time sweet. He felt himself falling into an abyss, but at the same time felt good and happy. At that moment when his strength abandoned him he thought that a divinity was moving about him.

Meanwhile Ursus had finished washing the wound in his head and put on it a healing ointment. Ursus took the brass basin from Lygia, and she took the golden goblet containing water mixed with wine that stood ready on the table and placed it to the lips of the sick man. Vinicius drank it up thirstily, and began to feel considerably better. When the dressing of the wound was done, the pain almost ceased. The wound and contusion began to grow together; consciousness fully returned to him.

"Give me a little more to drink," he said.

Lygia went out with the emptied goblet to the next room. Crispus, having exchanged a few words with Glaucus, walked up to the bed and said :

"Vinicius, God has not permitted thee to accomplish an evil deed, and pardoned thy life that thou shouldst repent. He, in comparison with whom man is only a piece of clay, delivered the defenceless into our hands; but Christ in whom we believe bade us love even our enemies. Therefore we have dressed thy wounds and, as Lygia said, we shall pray that God may give thee back thy former health; but we cannot care for thee any longer. Think it over quietly now, and decide whether it is becoming in thee to further pursue Lygia whom thou hast taken away from her protectors and her home,—and us, who have paid thee with kindness for wrongs."

"You want to leave me?" asked Vinicius.

"We wish to leave the house which may bring on us the persecution of the prefect of the city. Thy comrade is killed, and thou who art considered so strong among thy own people, art lying here wounded. It happened not through our fault, but the law and the danger may light on our heads."

"Be not afraid of persecution," replied Vinicius. "I shall defend you."

Crispus did not wish to answer Vinicius that they were not only annoyed by the prefect of the city, but that they wanted to remove Lygia from the reach of his pursuit.

"My lord," said he, "thy right hand is healthy,—take this tablet and the reed and write to thy servants to come for thee to-night with a litter to carry thee to thy own house, where it shall be more comfortable for thee than with us amidst this squalor. We live here with a poor widow who will soon return with her son,—that boy shall deliver thy letter; and we shall seek a different shelter."

Vinicius grew pale, understanding that they wished to separate him from Lygia, and that, if he lose her a second time, he might never be able to find her again. He felt that between him and his beloved girl something of great import had come to pass, and that, if he wished to possess her, he must seek new ways to think of which he had no time yet. He understood, furthermore, that the people he was among had the right not to believe him, and would not believe him whatever he might tell them, even if he would bind himself to return Lygia to Pomponia Græcina. He could have done it before,—could, instead of pursuing Lygia, have appealed to Pomponia Græcina and sworn that he abandoned his pursuit of her, and in that case Pomponia herself would have taken Lygia into her house again. He felt that no such promises would restrain them. They would not believe in any oath, however emphatic,—the more so because, not being a Christian he might swear to them by the immortal gods, in which neither himself specially believed, and which they consider evil spirits.

He wished desperately to win over Lygia and her protectors to his side. He was ready to decide on anything, but, in order to think of some means, it was necessary to gain time. Besides this, the opportunity of satiating his passion by looking at her for a few days was very dear to him, as a drowning man who considers every piece of floating wood, or broken oar, his salvation. Just so it seemed to him that during a few days he might be able to say certain words, which might bring him nearer to Lygia. Maybe he might think of something, or something good would happen of itself.

"Listen to me, Christians;" he said. "Yesterday I was with you at Ostrianum and listened to the teachings of your religion; but, had I not learned, even your action would have convinced me that you are good and worthy

people. Tell the widow that lives in this house to remain here, also you remain here, and allow me to stay with you. Let that man (here he pointed to Glaucus,) who has been the doctor, or who, at least, knows how to dress wounds,—let him say whether I could be carried home to-day. I am sick; I have a broken arm which must remain immovable for at least a few days; for this reason I declared that I shall not go hence unless you take me by force." Here he stopped, for breath failed him.

"No one will use force with thee," replied Crispus, "we only wish to take our heads hence."

Not being accustomed to resistance, the young man frowned and said:

"Permit me to take breath."

And after a while he added:

"No one will seek Croton whom Ursus throttled; he was preparing to leave for Beneventum whither Vatinius called him: hence all will think that he went there. No one saw us when we entered this house with Croton except the Greek who had been with us at Ostrianum. I will indicate to you his dwelling-place, and you bring him to me,—I will enjoin on him silence, for he is my hireling. I will write a letter to my own house that I too left for Beneventum. If the Greek has already informed the prefect, I will declare that I myself killed Croton who broke my arm. By the shade of my father and mother, I shall do it. Find out, and bring the Greek to me as soon as possible. His name is Chilo Chilonides."

"If such is the case, then Glaucus shall stay with thee, lord," said Crispus, "and, together with the widow, take care of thee."

Vinicius frowned still more.

"Pardon me, worthy old man for what I will tell thee," he said, "I owe thee gratitude, and thou art good and kind to me, but thou dost not tell me what thou thinkest in thy heart. Thou art afraid lest I call my slaves and command them to seize Lygia? Art thou not?"

"Yes!" replied Crispus, somewhat harshly.

"Then remember this, that with Chilo I shall speak in your presence, and in your presence also I shall write the letter home that I left this city; and hence I shall have no opportunity to send any other orders. Consider this and do not irritate me any further."

His face contorted with indignation, and after a while he commenced to speak excitedly :

"Dost thou think that I shall deny,—that I shall not admit that I want to stay here because I want to see Lygia? Even a fool would comprehend this, though I tried to deny it. But I no^o longer wish to take her by force; I can tell thee more,—in case she does not remain here, I shall, with my healthy hand, tear off the bandage from the broken one, and accept neither drink nor food,—and let my death fall on you and your brethren. Why do you care for me,—why do you not give command to kill me?"

Here he grew pale with anger and exhaustion. Lygia, who had heard the whole conversation in the next room, was frightened by his words, believing that Vinicius would fulfil his promises. Nevertheless, she did not wish his death for anything. Wounded and defenceless as he was, he awakened in her rather pity than fear. Living from the time of her flight among people continually excited with religious enthusiasm, always thinking of self-sacrifices, and endless goodness, she herself became imbued with the new spirit to such an extent that she rooted out from her heart the house she had been brought up in, the family, and her own happiness, and became converted into one of those Christian girls who afterward rejuvenated the old-grown soul of the world. Vinicius played a too important part in her fate, was thrust too near to her, and she could not forget him. The whole day she was thinking of him, and frequently prayed to God that the moment might come when she might pay him back good for evil, kindness for persecution, and to persuade him to turn Christian and be saved. Now it seemed to her that the moment arrived, and that her prayers had been heard.

She walked up to Crispus and, with her face lighted up, began to speak as if inspired from heaven :

"Let him stay with us, Crispus, and we shall not leave him till Christ returns his health to him."

The old presbyter, accustomed to see in all things the inspiration of God, at once thought, on seeing her exaltation, that perhaps a power from on high was speaking through her lips and, fearing in his heart, he bent down the head and said :

"Be it as thou sayest."

This ready obedience of the old man produced a wonderful and lasting effect on Vinicius who had not taken his

eyes from Lygia. He imagined that Lygia was considered among the Christians a kind of sybilla, or priestess surrounded with respect and obedience; and he felt humbled before her. To the love into which she had drawn him there was added now a certain fear, which made him think that it was even a crime to love her. At the same time he could not reconcile himself to the thought that their relations had changed,—that she was no longer in the power of his will, but he in hers; that he was lying sick, wounded, that he had ceased to be a conquering, ruling force, and that he had become a little child entrusted to her care. To his proud and wilful nature, a relation like this one with some one else would be humiliating; but now, however, he not only did not feel that he was humiliating himself, but was even ready to recognize Lygia as his superior. This feeling was to him so new that the eve before he could not have imagined it. It would have filled his mind even now, if he could make it clear to himself. But he did not even ask now why it seemed that this state of affairs was perfectly natural; he merely felt glad that it remained like that.

Vinicius wished to thank her, to express his gratitude, and some other feeling so strange to him that he did not even know by what name to call it, unless he called it *submission*. But these strong emotions exhausted him to such a degree that he did not even have strength enough to speak and thanked her with his eyes, which were radiant with gladness because she remained with him, thus enabling him to see her morning and noons, and maybe for many days. That delight was only diminished by the fear that he might lose again what he had gained, and that fear was so strong that, when Lygia brought him water once more and he was seized with a desire to kiss her hands, he was afraid to do it,—he, that same Vinicius who, at Cæsar's feast, had kissed her lips by force, and after her running away, resolved to drag her by the hair into his room, or to have her flogged, was afraid.

CHAPTER II.

VINICIUS began to fear that something from outside might interfere with this peaceful state of affairs and come in between him and Lygia. But, at the same time, he noticed with astonishment that they had ceased to expect promises from him concerning their safety; and for this reason he reminded them of the Greek and requested that some one be sent for him.

Crispus consented; and Ursus was sent for Chilo. Vinicius, who knew Chilo well, said to Ursus:

"I shall give thee a note to him, because he is very suspicious and cunning, and will probably bid some one to tell thee that he is not at home."

"If I only find him," replied Ursus, "he shall be brought, whether he want or not."

And throwing his garment over the shoulders, and taking the tablet on which Vinicius had written the note, he left the house. He soon found out Chilo's dwelling-place, but, as he had seen him only once, and that in the nighttime, he did not recognize him. Chilo, who did recognize Ursus, was much frightened on beholding him,—but seeing the note from Vinicius, he at last consented to go. On the way, the fear and abhorrence of the Christians disturbed the inmost depths of his soul, and, being much afraid of losing his dear life, he often resorted to his beloved practice of telling lies, and swore by all the Grecian Gods that he was a Christian. Although Ursus gave him no cause to fear him, he scarcely had strength enough to reach the house of the widow, where Vinicius was waiting for him.

But they reached it at last and entered. The evening was cloudy and cold; the room was somewhat dark, as the coal in the stove threw a dim reflection on the walls around. Vinicius did not recognize Chilo, but rather divined that the hooded man who was drawing near to him was Chilo. The Greek, seeing the bed in the corner and Vinicius on it, began to move directly toward it, without looking at the others. It seemed that Chilo believed that nearest to Vinicius would be less dangerous.

"Oh, my lord, why hast thou not listened to my counsels?" exclaimed he, putting his hands together.

"Be silent," replied Vinicius, "and listen."

He commenced to look steadily into Chilo's eyes, and spoke with emphasis, as if he wished that every word he uttered should be understood as a command, and impressed on Chilo's mind.

"Croton threw himself at me with the intention of killing and robbing me,—dost understand? Therefore I slew him,—these people here dressed my wounds which I received in the struggle."

Chilo at once understood that Vinicius was speaking in such a manner because of some agreement made before with the Christians,—and therefore wished to be believed. He even understood it from the expression of the young tribune's face, and without showing either doubt or astonishment, he at once declared:

"Croton was a faith-breaking wretch. I warned thee, lord, not to believe him. All my teachings bounded from his head as peas do when thrown against a wall. In all Hades there are not torments enough for him. He who cannot be honest, must be a rogue; and what is harder for a rogue than to be an honest man? But to fall on his benefactor, a lord so magnanimous,—oh gods!"

Here, however, he remembered that he had represented himself on the way as a Christian, and stopped.

Vinicius said:

"Were it not for the 'Sica,' he would have slain me."

"Blessed be the moment when I advised thee to take the knife even."

But Vinicius looked at the Greek with an inquiring glance, and asked:

"What hast thou been doing to-day?"

"What? Have I not told thee that I have been bringing offerings to the gods for thy health?"

"Nothing more?"

"And was about to visit thee, when this good man came in and told me that thou hast sent for me."

"Take these tablets and carry them to my house; thou wilt find there my freedman, Demas, give it to him. On them is written that I went to Beneventum. Tell Demas from thyself that I went there this morning, summoned by an urgent letter from Petronius."

Vinicius repeated still more distinctly:

"I went to Beneventum, remember!"

"Thou hast gone, my lord; I took leave of thee at Porta Capena, and since the time of thy departure such sadness possesses me that, if thy magnanimity will not soften it, I shall cry myself to death, as did the unhappy wife of Zethos in grief for Itylos."

Vinicius, notwithstanding his sickness and his knowledge of the Greek's suppleness, could not refrain from smiling. But, being glad that Chilo understood him to a syllable, he said:

"Therefore I shall add in my letter that thy tears be wiped away; give me the candle."

Chilo, entirely pacified, walked up to the wall at which the candle was burning, and took it to carry it to the bed; but in doing it, the hood slipped from his head and the light fell directly on his face. Glaucus sprang up from his seat, and, moving quickly, stood before him.

"Dost recognize me, Cephas?" he asked.

In his voice there was something so terrible that a shiver ran through all present. Chilo lifted the candle and almost in the same moment threw it on the floor; then he bent nearly double, and began to groan:

"I am not he—I am not he,—mercy!"

Glaucus turned to the Christians who were sitting around the table and said:

"This man betrayed and ruined me and my whole family."

This history was well known to all the Christians, as to Vinicius, who did not guess who that Glaucus was, only because he fainted so often while he was dressing his wounds that he did not hear his name. But for Ursus that short scene and the words of Glaucus were like a flash of lightning in darkness. Recognizing Glaucus, he ran up to Chilo, seized his hands and, bending them back, exclaimed:

"It is he who tried to persuade me to kill Glaucus!"

"Mercy—I will give you—save me, lord!" he exclaimed, turning to Vinicius. "I trusted in thee, take my part. Thy letter—I shall take it to thy house, my lord, my lord!"

But Vinicius, who looked on at what was passing with more indifference than any one,—first, because the affairs of the Greek were more or less known to him, and, second, because his heart was unacquainted with pity,—said:

"Bury him in the garden, some one else will take the letter."



"DANGER ! WE ARE CONSTANTLY AMID THE SHADOWS
OF DEATH."

These words seemed to Chilo his death-sentence. His bones were shaking in the terrible grip of Ursus's hand, and pain filled his eyes with tears.

"In the name of your God—pity," cried he, "I am a Christian! Peace be with you; I am a Christian. And if you don't believe me, baptize me again, baptize me twice, ten times. Glaucus, that is a mistake! Permit me to relate,—make me a slave. Do not kill me! Have mercy!"

His voice, stifled with pain, became still weaker. The apostle stood up at the table, and for a moment his white head shook on his breast; then he said amid silence:

"The Redeemer said this to us: 'If thy brother has sinned against thee, chastise him; and if he repents, forgive him; and if he has offended seven times in the day against thee, and has turned to thee seven times in a day saying: 'Have mercy on me,'—forgive him.'"

Then came a still great silence in the room. Glaucus stood for a long time with his hands covering his face; then he removed them, and said:

"Cephas, may God forgive thee, as I forgive thee, in the name of Christ."

Ursus, releasing the arms of the Greek, added:

"May the Saviour pardon me as I pardon thee."

Chilo fell to the ground and, supported on it with his hands, turned his head like a wild beast caught in a snare to see from what side death might come. He still did not believe his own eyes and ears, not daring to hope for mercy. Consciousness, however, returned to him steadily; only his blue lips were still quivering from terror.

The Apostle turned to him with these words:

"Go in peace!"

Chilo rose, but did not speak yet. He involuntarily drew near the bed of Vinicius, as if still to beg for protection; for he had not time enough to comprehend that the young tribune, although he employed his services, and was still, to a certain extent, his accomplice, condemned him, while those whom he had offended forgave him; this thought was to occur to him later. At present only astonishment and incredulity were visible in his looks. Although he had already comprehended that he was pardoned, he nevertheless wished to escape alive as quickly as possible, from that house and from those incomprehensible people, whose kindness terrified him almost as much as their cruelty would have terrified. It seemed to him that, if he

hesitated longer, something unexpected would happen again, and, standing above Vinicius, he said with a broken voice :

"Give me the letter, lord; give me the letter." And, snatching the tablet which Vinicius handed him, he made one obeisance to the Christians, another to the patient, and, pushing along sidewise by the wall, he hurried out through the door. In the garden where darkness surrounded him, his hair stood on end from fear; he believed that Ursus would run out after him, and kill him in the dark. Chilo would have run with all his might, but his legs would not move. Next moment they were entirely uncontrollable, for Ursus stood indeed near him.

He fell on the ground, and began to groan

"Urban—in the name of Christ."

But Urban said :

"Don't be afraid; the Apostle bade me escort thee beyond the gate, lest thou might go astray in the darkness; and, if strength failed thee, I shall conduct thee home."

Chilo raised his head :

"What dost thou say—what? Thou wilt not kill me?"

"No, I shall not kill thee, and if I seized thy arms somewhat too roughly, and harmed a bone in thee, pardon me."

"Help me to rise," said the Greek, "so thou wilt not kill me, eh? lead me out to the street, I will go farther alone."

Ursus raised him from the ground, as he might a feather and, having placed him on his feet, led him through the dim corridor to the second court. From there was a passage to the entrance and the street. In the corridor Chilo repeated once more in his mind: "It is all over with me." Only when he found himself on the street did he recover and say :

"Now I can go alone."

"Peace be with thee."

"And with thee and thine. Let me take breath."

After Ursus had retreated some distance, he breathed with a full breast. Then he felt his waist and hips, as if to convince himself that he had not become a cripple; and at last moved on quickly.

CHAPTER III.

Also Vinicius could not account to himself for what had happened, and wondered in the depth of his soul no less than Chilo. The fact that the Christians had treated him in such a manner, and, instead of revenging themselves on him, dressed his wounds with such care, he ascribed, partly, to the teaching of their religion, and, particularly, to the influence of Lygia; and, to some extent, to his own dignified rank. But their treatment of Chilo simply was beyond his comprehension of human mercy. He involuntarily thought: "Why have not the Christians killed the Greek? They might have done it with impunity. Ursus could bury him in the garden, or throw him at night into the Tiber:"—at that time, when Cæsar himself committed so many murders in the nighttime, there were washed ashore so many bodies of drowned people, in the morning, that no one even asked who they were, or whence they came.

Therefore, according to the opinion of Vinicius, the Christians not only could, but should have killed Chilo. Pity was not entirely unknown in that world to which the young Patrician belonged. The Athenians consecrated a temple to Pity, and were long opposed to the introduction in Athens of Gladiatorial combats. It happened that in Rome conquered people were pardoned,—as, for instance, Calicratus, the king of the Britons, who was taken captive under the reign of the emperor Claudius, and provided for by him bountifully, dwelt in the city of freedom. But revenge for a personal wrong seemed to Vinicius as to his contemporaries, fully becoming and just. Not to avenge was a thing that did not accord with his bent of mind. Although Vinicius had heard at Ostrianum that one should love even his enemies, he considered these words as belonging to some theory without application to real life. And now he thought that they did not kill Chilo only because the day was among festivals, or was in some period of the moon in which Christians were forbidden to shed blood. He heard that certain peoples were, at a certain time in the

year, not even allowed to go to war. But, if that was the case, why did they not deliver Chilo into the hands of justice?—because the Apostle said that those who have sinned seven times should be seven times pardoned? And did Glaucus therefore say to Chilo: “May God forgive thee, as I forgive thee in the name of Christ?” The deed Chilo had perpetrated seemed to him the most terrible a man could do. The soul of Vinicius, at the thought of what, for instance, he would do to a man who killed his Lygia, began to seethe; there was no vengeance so terrible that he would not wreak on him. And Glaucus had forgiven, and Ursus, too, had forgiven,—Ursus who, it is evident, might kill in Rome any one he liked with perfect impunity; for all he needed was to kill the king of the groves of Nemi, and take his place. Against a man of such strength, with whom even Croton could not get through, even the gladiator holding that office to which he succeeded only by killing the former king, would not dare to stand up.

To all these questions there was one answer: the Christians did not kill because of a goodness whose like had never been in this world, and because of their great love for mankind that teaches one to forget himself, the wrongs done to him, his fortunes and sorrows, and live for others. The kind of recompense the Christians looked for, Vinicius heard at Ostrianum, but could not reconcile himself to it. He felt that this terrestrial life stripped of all hope for happiness and entirely devoted to the welfare of others, must be a sorry one. Therefore, in the ruminations of Vinicius concerning the Christians there was blended, beside astonishment, also pity, and, as it were, a shade of contempt. They seemed to him, on account of the strange precepts of their religion, like sheep,—sheep destined to be, sooner or later, devoured by wolves. This Roman nature could not bring itself to respect people who allow themselves to be devoured. One thing, however, struck him,—namely, that after the departure of Chilo the faces of all present brightened up with a deep gladness.

The Apostle walked up to Glaucus and, placing his hands on his head, said:

“Christ has triumphed in thee.”

Glaucus lifted toward heaven his eyes beaming with such faith and gladness as if a great fortune were sent down to him. Vinicius who could only comprehend joy arising from vengeance, looked at him with eyes staring from fever,

and somewhat as on a madman. He saw not without irritation that Lygia put her lips of a queen to the hands of that man whose appearance reminded one of a slave, and it seemed to him that the order of the whole world had been inverted.

After this, Ursus told how he led Chilo out to the street, and how he asked the Greek to excuse him for the harm he might have done his bones. For this the Apostle blessed him also. Crispus said that that day was a day of great victory. Hearing of that victory, Vinicius became utterly confused.

When Lygia had given him again the cooling drink, the young Patrician took her hand for a moment, and asked :

"It seems, then, that thou hast pardoned me?"

"We are Christians; we are forbidden to conceal a feeling of revenge in our hearts."

"Lygia, whatever thy God may be, I will bring hecatombs in his honor,—be it only because he is thy God."

"Thou wilt bring him offerings in thy heart by loving him."

"Only because he is thy God," added Vinicius, lifting his head.

The eyes of the sick man closed again; his strength failed him.

Lygia left the apartment, but soon returned and, walking up to the bed, bent over Vinicius to assure herself that he was sleeping. Vinicius, feeling her presence, opened his eyes, and smiled. She placed her hand softly on him, as if to pet him into rest. A sweet feeling came over him, but at the same time he felt very ill. Night was approaching and with the increasing darkness his fever increased. Vinicius could not fall asleep, and followed with his eyes every gesture of Lygia. At times, however, he relapsed into a forgetfulness; still he saw and heard everything that went on around him, though reality blended with the visions of his fever. It seemed to him that in some old deserted graveyard stood a temple in the form of a tower; Lygia was the priestess in that temple. Vinicius never diverted his eyes from her. She appeared to him standing on the top of the tower with a lute in her hand, surrounded with light, and resembling those priestesses who were chanting in the night hymns in honor of Luna, and whom he happened to see in the East. He himself was climbing up winding stairs to take her away with him. Behind him crept Chilo with his

teeth knocking with fear and terror. "Don't do it, young man, because she is a priestess whom He will avenge." Vinicius did not know what Chilo was saying, but understood that he was going to commit a sacrilege, and also commenced to feel an inexpressible terror. When he had reached the balustrade on the top of the tower, there stood beside Lygia the old Apostle with his silvery beard, and said:

"Lift no hand on her, because she belongs to me." The old man, having said this, commenced to walk with Lygia on the white path formed by the moonbeams and leading directly to heaven. Vinicius, stretching out his hands to them, implored them to take him along.

Here he awoke, recollected, and began to look around. The lamp on the tall staff was burning still more dimly, but still cast a light sufficiently clear. All were sitting in front of the fire warming themselves, as the night was quite cold. Vinicius saw their breathing, coming from their lips like steam.

The Apostle sat in the midst, and, at his knees, on a footstool,—Lygia; a little farther, Glaucus, Crispus, Miriam, Ursus and, on the other side, Nazarius, the son of Miriam, a lad with a beautiful face, and thin black curls falling back on his shoulders. Lygia, with her eyes lifted to the Apostle, listened, while the heads of all were turned to him. He was speaking in an undertone. Vinicius looked at him with a superstitious awe, almost equal to the terror he had felt in his feverish dream. He thought that in that dream he beheld the truth,—that that comer from distant shores was in reality taking away Lygia from him, and leading her somewhere on unknown paths.

Vinicius was convinced that the old man was speaking about him, and might be considering how to separate him from Lygia. It seemed impossible to the young tribune that any one could speak of anything else. He therefore concentrated his attention as much as he could, and commenced to listen to Peter. It turned out, however, that Vinicius was mistaken. The Apostle spoke again of Christ:

"They only live through His name," thought Vinicius. The old man related how they captured the Redeemer. There came soldiers and the servants of the high priests to take him. When he asked: "Whom are ye seeking?" they replied: "Jesus of Nazareth." Then he said to

them: "I am He;" and they fell to the ground and dared not lift a hand on Him. Only after the second question they seized Him.

Here the Apostle ceased speaking and, putting out his hands toward the fire, added:

"The night was a cold one, such as this, but my heart was boiling. I drew a sword to defend Him, and chopped off an ear of the high priest's slave. I would have defended Him more, even more than my own life, had He not said to me: 'Put thy sword into its sheath again; the cup my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?' Then they seized Jesus and bound Him."

When he had said this, he covered his face with his hands and remained silent, thereby striving to better recall the scenes of the past in order to give a more vivid description. Ursus, not having the power to quiet his internal excitement, poked and fixed the coal in the stove till the sparks began to fly about in a golden rain and the wood began to burn brighter. Then he sat down again, and cried out: "And might happen what would,—ehéu!"

But seeing that Lygia put her finger to her lip, he remained silent. He, nevertheless, breathed heavily, and it was evident that a tempest raged in his soul. Ursus who was always ready to kiss the Apostle's footsteps, was displeased with his action. Had some one dared in his presence to raise a hand on the Saviour,—had he been with Christ on that night,—he would have driven away the soldiers, the slaves of the high priests and the servants. His eyes were filled with tears at the thought of it, and through his sorrow and his mental struggle, he thought, on the one hand, that he would have not only defended the Redeemer himself, but that he would have called to his aid the Lygians, and, on the other, that, had he acted thus, it would have been against the teachings of the Redeemer, and would prevent the redemption of the world.

Therefore he could not refrain from weeping. The Apostle, taking his hands off his forehead, continued the story; but Vinicius once more fell into a feverish doze. What he heard now commingled with what he had heard the previous night at Ostrianum of the appearance of Christ on the banks of the Tiberian sea. He saw in his fever a wide sea and the boat of a fisherman in which were Peter and Lygia. He himself was swimming toward them with all his might, but the wound in his broken arm prevented him

from reaching them. The roaring waves dashed into his face, he was drowning and cried out for rescue with all his might. Then Lygia fell on her knees before the Apostle Peter; the old man turned the boat, and put out an oar to him. Vinicius caught it, and with their assistance crept into the boat, and fell on the bottom of it.

Then it seemed to him that he saw many people swimming for the boat. The waves covered the heads of some with foam; of others, only the hands were visible, but Peter helped the drowning one after another and dragged them into the boat which extended as if by a miracle. The boat was soon filled with the multitude of people that was greater than the crowd that had gathered at Ostrianum. Vinicius wondered how such a crowd could find room in one boat, and began to fear that it would sink. But Lygia commenced to encourage him, and showed him a certain light on a far-off shore toward which they were sailing. Here the dream of Vinicius blended once more with what he had heard at Ostrianum from the lips of the Apostle Peter concerning the appearance of Christ on the shore. In the light of the far-off shore he now distinguished a certain form toward which Peter was steering, and, as they came nearer to the shore, the storm began to abate, the surface of the water grew smoother, and the light showed brighter. The crowd commenced to sing sweet hymns, the air became filled with the odor of nard; the water gleamed with the colors of the rainbow, as if from the bottom of the sea lilies and roses were looking out. At last the skiff glided up to the sandy shore. Lygia took Vinicius by the hand and said:

"Come, I will guide thee."

And she led him out to the light.

* * * * *

Vinicius woke once more, but this time he regained consciousness but slowly; he did not at once become aware of reality. For some time it seemed to him that he was still on the sea, surrounded by the multitude of people. He was seeking Petronius among them, but could not to his sorrow find him. The flame in the stove near which no one was warming himself now, finally recalled him to full consciousness. In the reflection of the stove recently filled with wood he beheld Lygia sitting near his bed.

The sight of her touched him to the depth of his heart.

He remembered that the young girl was awake the previous night at Ostrianum, and spent the whole day taking care of him. Now when all had retired to rest, she alone sat watching beside his bed. It was, however, easy to understand that Lygia was tired out: she sat motionless with closed eyes. Vinicius did not know whether she was asleep, or absorbed in thought. He looked at her profile, at her hands folded on her lap, and in his pagan head the idea formed itself with difficulty that alongside her proud and confident Hellenic and Roman beauty there existed some inner, entirely pure, and spiritual beauty. He could not resolve to call that beauty Christian; thinking, however, of Lygia, he could not separate her from the teachings of her religion. He even understood that Lygia whom he had injured was busying herself about him at such a time when all had gone to rest because the Christian religion prescribes to act thus. But while wondering at Christianity, he at the same time felt harassed at the thought of it. He would prefer Lygia if she acted thus out of love for him, for his face, for his eyes, for the shape of his body,—in short, for all those attractions on account of which the snow-white arms of many Greek and Roman maidens were wound round his neck.

But the thought at once occurred to him that, if Lygia would become like other women, she would lose in his eyes a part of her beauty. This supposition annoyed him. What was going on within him?—He felt that a new sensation had crept into his heart,—a sensation strange to the world in which he had been living till then.

Lygia opened her eyes, and, seeing that Vinicius was looking at her, she walked up to the bed and said:

“I am with thee.”

He replied:

“I have seen thy soul in a dream.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE next day Vinicius awoke very weak, but with a clear head, and free of fever. It seemed to him that he had been awakened by the noise of conversation, but when he opened his eyes, he saw that Lygia was no longer near him. Only Ursus was bending over the stove, raking the grey

ashes and seeking live coal, which when he had found, he commenced to blow with such force as if he were working with the bellows of a smith, and not with his mouth. Remembering that that man had throttled Croton the previous day, Vinicius commenced to examine, with the curiosity of a genuine gladiator, his gigantic back, which was almost like the back of a cyclopes, and his legs which resembled pillars.

"Praised be Mercury that my neck was not broken by him," Vinicius thought in his heart. "By Pollux! If the other Lygians resemble this one, the Danubians will sometimes have hard work with them."

"Ei, slave!" he said aloud to Ursus.

Ursus drew his head out of the chimney and, with an almost friendly smile, said:

"God grant thee, lord, a good day, and good health; but I am a freeman and not a slave."

Vinicius, who very much desired to learn from Ursus about Lygia's birthplace, was favorably impressed with these words; for conversation with a free though common man offended less his patrician and Roman pride than conversation with a slave, whom neither the law, nor custom acknowledged as a man.

"Then thou dost not belong to the family of Aulus?" he asked.

"No, my lord; I serve Callina, as I served her mother, out of affection for them."

And, having before put more wood in the stove, he again concealed his head in the chimney, in order to poke up the coal; then he drew it out once more, and said:

"There are no slaves among us."

But Vinicius inquired:

"Where is Lygia?"

"She just left this room, and I have to prepare a meal for thee, my lord. She has been caring for thee all night."

"Why, then, didst thou not relieve her?"

"She wished to sit up; and I have to obey."

He frowned and, a moment later, added:

"Had I not obeyed her, thou, my lord, wouldst not be now among the living."

"Is it possible that thou art sorry that I was not killed?"

"No, my lord; Christ forbade us to kill."

"But Atacinus and Croton?"

"I could not do otherwise," muttered Ursus, and commenced to look with pity on his hands which still remained pagan, although the soul accepted Christianity. Then he placed the pot on the crane and, standing near it, gazed thoughtfully at the fire.

"That is thy fault, my lord," he said at last; "why hast thou lifted thy hand on her, the kingly daughter?"

At the first moment the thought flashed on Vinicius how could a common man and a Barbarian dare, not only to argue with him, but also to censure him. To those uncommon and improbable things which had happened to him the night before, another was added. But feeling himself weak and not having his slaves about him, Vinicius restrained himself, especially because he wished to know some particulars concerning the life of Lygia.

Therefore, after he had quieted down, he commenced to inquire of Ursus about the war of the Lygians against Vannius and the Suevi. Ursus related gladly, but could not add much to what Vinicius had heard before from Aulus Plautius. He, Ursus, had not been in the war, because he escorted the hostages to the camp of Atelius Hister. He only knew that the Lygians had beaten the Suevi and Yazygi, but that their leader and king had fallen from the arrows of the Yazygi. Soon after they received news that the Semnones had set fire to the woods on their boundaries, they returned in haste to avenge the wrong, and the hostages remained with Atelius, who ordered at first to give them kingly honors. Then Lygia's mother died. The Roman commander did not know what to do with the child. Ursus wished to return with her to their country, but the road was dangerous because of wild beasts and wild tribes; when news came that an embassy of Lygians had come to Pomponius, offering him aid against the Marcomani, Hister sent him with her, to Pomponius. When they came to him they learned that there were no ambassadors, and for this reason they remained in his camp, from where Pomponius brought them to Rome and, after the triumph, he gave the king's daughter to Pomponia Græcina.

Although all this, with the exception of some unimportant particulars, was known to Vinicius, he listened to Ursus with great satisfaction; for his pride of family was pleased that an eyewitness had confirmed Lygia's royal descent. As a king's daughter she might occupy a position

at Cæsar's court equal to the daughters of the very first families, the more so because the people over whom her father had reigned, had not warred with the Romans up to that time; and, though Barbarian, might become terrible; because, as Hister himself testified, it possessed an immense number of warriors. Ursus confirmed this testimony completely; for, when Vinicius inquired of him concerning the Lygians, he replied:

"We live in woods; but we have so much land that no one knows where it ends, and there are many people on it. There are also wooden towns in the forests, in which there are rich commodities; for whatever spoils the Semnones, the Marcomani, the Vandals and the Quadi bring from their wars, we take from them. They dare not come to us; only when the wind blows from their side, they burn our woods. But we are neither afraid of them, nor of the Roman Cæsar."

"The gods gave the Romans dominion over the world," said Vinicius, severely.

"The gods are evil spirits," simply replied Ursus, "and where there are no Romans there is no dominion."

He adjusted the coal, and said as if to himself:

"When Cæsar took Callina to his court, and I thought that harm might meet her, I wanted to go to the forest and send Lygians to defend the king's daughter. And Lygians would have moved toward the Danube, for they are good people, though pagan. There I should have brought them 'good news.' But as it is, whenever Callina returns to Pomponia, I will beseech her to permit me to go to them; because Christus was born far from them, and they have not even heard of him. He knew better than I where He should be born, but if He had come to the world with us, in our forest, we would surely not have tortured Him to death; we would have guarded and taken care of the child, so that never should He want for game, mushrooms, beaver-skins, or amber. We would have given Him all the spoils taken from the Suevi or the Marcomani so that He might live in comfort and plenty."

Saying this, Ursus put the vessel with food on the fire for Vinicius, and was silent. His thoughts evidently wandered for some time on the Lygian wildernesses; and only when the liquid began to boil, he poured it into a shallow plate, and said:

"Glaucus advises, lord, that even the healthy arm thou

should move as little as possible, and therefore Callina bade me give thee food."

Lygia commanded! To this he had no answer. It did not even enter into the head of Vinicius to oppose her will, as if she were not only a king's daughter, but a goddess. He did not reply one word, and Ursus, sitting near him, took out the liquid from the shallow plate with a small cup, and put it to his lips. He did it with such care, and with such a friendly smile, that Vinicius did not believe his own eyes. Was it possible that this was the same terrible Titan who had throttled Croton the day before, had thrown himself on him like a storm, and would have torn him to pieces but for Lygia? The young patrician for the first time in his life began to ponder on what might take place in the heart of a common man, a Barbarian, and a servant.

But Ursus turned out to be a nurse as awkward as careful. The cup was entirely lost among his herculean fingers, so that there was no place left for the patient's lips.

After a few fruitless efforts, the giant was troubled, and said:

"Ei! it is much easier to catch an aurocks."

Vinicius was amused by the Lygian's anxiety, but his carefulness interested him no less. He had occasion to see in the circus the terrible aurocks brought from northern wildernesses against which the strongest "bestiarii" went with fear, and which yielded only to the elephant in size and strength.

"Hast thou tried to take such beasts by the horns?" asked he.

"Before twenty winters had passed over my head," replied Ursus, "I was afraid; but afterward it happened."

And he again commenced to feed Vinicius still more awkwardly than before.

"I must ask Miriam, or Nazarius," he said.

But just then the pale face of Lygia appeared from behind the door.

"I will soon assist thee," said she.

And a minute later she came out from the bedroom, where she has been preparing to go to sleep, for she was dressed only in close tunic, which was called by the ancients "capitium," and which covered the whole breast, and her hair was unbound. Vinicius, whose heart beat louder at

sight of her, began to upbraid her for not thinking of sleep yet, but she replied cheerfully :

"I was just going to do it, but first I will give thee the food."

And, taking the cup, she sat down on the edge of the bed and began to give him the food. Vinicius felt at once pacified and delighted. When she inclined toward him, and her unbound hair fell on his breast, the warmth of her body made his blood course faster. He grew pale with emotion; but while being shaken with passion and desire, he felt that that was a being dearest to him, and adored above all else, and that in comparison with her all the world was worth nothing. At first he wished to have her, now he commenced to love her with all his heart. Before that, he had been in actions as in thought, simply an egotist, who cared only for himself; but now he commenced to think about her. And for some time he refused to take the food and, though in looking at her he found an inexhaustible delight, he said :

"Enough. Go to rest, my goddess."

"Do not call me goddess," she replied, "I should not hear it."

Nevertheless she smiled at him and said that sleep had fled from her, that she did not feel burdened with weariness, and that she would not go to rest till Glaucus came. He heard her words, which were like music to him, and his heart beat louder and louder, became still more filled with gratitude, and he began to think how he might best show her his gratitude. After being silent for some time, he said :

"Lygia, I had not known thee before. But now I know that I wanted to come near thee by a false way ; and I say to thee : return to Pomponia Græcina, and be assured that no one shall raise a hand on thee."

Her face became sad again.

"I would be happy if I could see her from afar even, but to return to her—it is impossible now."

"Why?" inquired Vinicius, with astonishment.

"We Christians know, through Acte, what is done on the Palatine. Knowest thou not that Cæsar, soon after my flight, and before his departure for Naples, summoned Aulus and Pomponia and, thinking that they had assisted me, threatened them with his anger? Fortunately Aulus could answer: 'Thou knowest, my lord, that never has a

lie escaped from my lips; I swear to thee we did not help her to escape, and, as thou dost not know, we don't know what has happened to her.' And Cæsar believed, and then forgot, and, on the advice of the elders, I have not even once written a letter to mother to inform her where I am, that she might boldly answer that she does not know where I am. Thou wilt not comprehend this, perhaps; but we have no right to lie, even in a question involving our life. Such is our creed, to which we wish to adhere with all our hearts; and thus I have not seen Pomponia from the time I left her house. But at long intervals distant echoes reach her that I am alive, and not in danger."

These words awakened a longing in her heart, and tears suffused her eyes; but soon she calmed herself and said:

"I know that also Pomponia is sorrowing for me; but we have the consolation which others have not."

"Yes," answered Vinicius, "Christus is your consolation, but I don't understand it."

"Look at us! There are no final partings for us, no pains, no sufferings; they become pleasure with us. Even death, which is the end of life to you, is to us merely its beginning—the exchange of a lower for a higher happiness, a happiness less calm for one calmer and eternal. Consider what must a religion be which enjoins on us love even for our enemies, which forbids us to lie, purifies our souls from hatred, and promises eternal bliss after death."

"I heard that at Ostrianum, and saw how you had treated me and Chilo. But whenever I think of it, it seems to me that it was a dream, and that I ought not to believe neither my ears, nor my eyes. But answer me this question: Art thou happy?"

"Yes," replied Lygia; "those who believe in Christus cannot be unhappy."

Vinicius looked at her as if what she had said were beyond his comprehension.

"And wouldst thou like to return to Pomponia?"

"I would, with all my heart; and will return, if such be the will of God."

"I say to thee, therefore, return; and I swear to thee by my lares* that I shall not touch thee with my hands."

Lygia meditated for a moment, and then replied:

"No, I cannot bring danger on those near me. Cæsar does not like the family of Plautius. Should I return—

* Good spirits; the gods of the domestic hearth.

thou knowest how every news is spread about Rome by slaves—the news of my return would soon be carried throughout the city. Cæsar would undoubtedly learn it also, punish Aulus for it immediately, and, at best, take me from them anyhow.”

“Yes,” replied Vinicius, frowning,—“he might do it. He would do it, be it only to show that his will must be fulfilled. Of course, he has forgotten, or does not wish to think of, thee; because I was insulted, and not he. It may be that—after taking thee from Aulus—he would send thee to me, and I could return thee to Pomponia.”

But Lygia inquired sadly :

“Vinicius, wouldst thou see me again on the Palatine?”

“He set his teeth, and rejoined :

No. Thou art right. I am a fool because I said it! No!”

All at once he beheld before him a precipice almost bottomless. He was a patrician, a military tribune, and a rich man. But above all the powers of that world to which he belonged was an insane person whose will and malignity no one could foresee. Only such people as the Christians, people to whom all this world, its sufferings and even death was as nothing,—could afford not to reckon with; and not to fear, him. All others ought to tremble before him. All the terrors of the dreadful time in which he lived showed themselves to Vinicius in all their monstrous reality. He could not return Lygia to Pomponia then, for fear that the monster might remember her and turn his wrath on her; and for the same reason should he take her as wife, he might expose himself, her, and Aulus. A minute of ill-humor would suffice to ruin all.

Vinicius felt, for the first time in his life, that, the world must be changed and transformed, or it would become intolerable. He understood also this, which a minute before had been dark to him, that in such times only Christians could be happy.

A feeling of deep sorrow came over him at thought that he himself had spoiled his and Lygia's life, and that out of those difficulties there was no outcome. And under the influence of that deep sorrow, he commenced to speak.

“Dost thou know, Lygia, that thou art happier than I? Thou art steeped in poverty, but in this poor chamber, among simple people, thou hast thy religion and thy Christ; but I having nothing except thee, when I lacked thee,

was like a beggar without a crust of bread and without a roof above him. Thou art dearer to me than anything in the world. I sought thee because I could not live without thee. I wanted neither feast nor sleep. Were it not for the hope of seeing thee, I should have thrown myself on a sword. But I was afraid of death, because then I should not see thee. I tell thee the plain truth that I could not live without thee. I have till now lived only in the hope of finding and beholding thee. Dost thou remember our first conversation, in Aulus's house? Thou hadst drawn a fish on the sand, and I understood what that meant. Dost thou remember how we played ball? I loved thee then more than life, and thou hadst begun to understand that I loved thee. Aulus came, frightened us with Libitina, and interrupted our conversation. At our departure, Pomponia said that God is one, almighty,—all-merciful, and it did not come to our heads that your God is Christus. Let Him give thee me and I shall love Him, though He seems to me a God of slaves, foreigners and beggars. Thou art sitting by me, but thy thoughts are with Him. Think also of me, or I shall hate Him. Thou art my only goddess. Blessed be thy father and mother; blessed be the land from which thou didst spring. I should wish to embrace thy feet and pray to thee, give thee honors, bring thee offerings, do thee homage, thee,—thou thrice divine. Thou dost, canst not know how I love thee!"

Having said this, he placed his hand on his pale face, and closed his eyes.

Lygia thought his words blasphemous, but her heart beat with such force, as if it wanted to tear the tunic enclosing her bosom. She could rid herself of her pity for him and his sufferings. She was touched by the respect with which he spoke to her. She felt beloved and deified without bounds; she understood that that unyielding and powerful man belonged to her now, soul and body, like a slave; and the consciousness of his submission and her own power filled her with happiness.

But all at once she understood that a moment might come in which his love would seize her, and carry her away, like a whirlwind, and, being conscious of this, she felt what he had felt a moment before—that she was standing on the edge of a precipice. The idea of loving some one else instead of Christ was a sin in her opinion,—a sin against Him and against religion. Seeing that other feel-

ings and desires might be roused in the depth of her soul, she was seized by alarm for her own future and her own heart.

At this moment of mental struggle came Glaucus, with the intention of caring for the patient and studying his health. In a moment anger and impatience were reflected on the face of Vinicius. In despite of what he had heard at Ostrianum, and despite the influence of Lygia, there remained in his breast the former harsh and selfish heart, truly Roman and wolfish, incapable of being irradiated, not only by the sweet light of Christian sentiments, but even by gratitude.

Lygia went away at last filled with internal care and anxiety. Formerly in her prayers she had given to Christ her soul, calm and pure, as a tear. Now that true calmness of her soul was disturbed, a poisonous insect had lighted on the flower of her heart and poisoned it with its breath. Even sleep brought her no rest, notwithstanding her two sleepless nights. She dreamed that at Ostrianum Nero, with a whole band of Augustians, bacchantes, corybantes, and gladiators, were throwing crowds of Christians under the wheels of his chariot, wreathed with roses; and that Vinicius, seizing her by the arm, lifted her up into the quadriga and, pressing her to his bosom, whispered: "Come with us."

CHAPTER V.

FROM that moment Lygia's visits to the common room were somewhat rarer, and she rarer came near the couch of Vinicius, but her tranquillity, nevertheless, did not return. She saw Vinicius following her with imploring eyes; that he was suffering but dared not complain lest he might turn her away; that in her alone was concentrated his life and happiness. Then her heart swelled with pity. But she soon noticed that the more she avoided him, the greater was her pity, and that by this her feelings toward him became more tender. She often thought that it was her duty to be near Vinicius, first, because the divine teaching commanded her to pay good for evil; and, second, while conversing with him, she could convert him to the religion of Christ. But her conscience told her that she was deceiving herself, and that she was drawn to Vinicius from other motives,

namely, his love and the charm he exerted over her. Thus she lived in discord, which was growing daily. She felt herself drawn into a mesh from which she could not release herself. She had to confess to herself that it required great exertions on her part to counteract the desire to sit on his couch. When she approached, his face lighted up, and thereupon her heart overflowed with happiness. Once she noticed traces of tears on his eyelashes, and for the first time in life it occurred to her that she could dry them with kisses. Frightened at the thought, and full of loathing for herself, she wept all the night following.

And Vinicius was very patient. When his eyes flashed with anger, and self-will, he would suddenly restrain himself, and look with alarm at Lygia, as if begging forgiveness. At the thought that she was loved she felt at once guilty and happy. Vinicius now spoke with less pride. He began to view the poor slave physician, the old Miriam and the prayerful Crispus as human. He was wondering at the thought, but it returned again and again. He began to like Ursus, who developed an attachment for him, because the giant was inexhaustible in his narratives about Lygia. Lygia he considered above the people that surrounded her, but, nevertheless, he began to observe the simple and poor people, their habits and customs, and often found them interesting. Nazarius, however, he could not endure, because he dared to love Lygia. For a considerable time he restrained himself, but when the boy brought Lygia two quails, which he bought with the money he earned, the Quirite blood rose in Vinicius. He wanted to know how she could tolerate his bringing gifts to her.

"Dost thou not know that the Greeks call his people Jewish dogs?" he asked her.

"I do not know what the Greeks call them," she answered; "but I do know that Nazarius is a Christian and my brother."

She looked at him with sorrow and wonder, for she thought that he had outgrown his capriciousness. But Vinicius felt like telling her that he would have such a "brother" beaten to death. But he suppressed his anger, and after a while he said:

"Forgive me, Lygia. For me thou art the daughter of a king and the adopted child of Aulus." He subdued himself to the extent of promising to give the boy a pair of peacocks or flamingoes from his villa.

Knowing what efforts such victories over himself cost him, her heart began to incline more and more toward him.

His merit with regard to Nazarius was not so great, however, as she supposed. Vinicius could be angered but not jealous of him. In the eyes of Vinicius, the son of Miriam was no more than a dog, and, besides, the boy's love was the unconscious and dutiful love of a servant. The young tribune had to struggle in order to reconcile himself, even in silence, to the honor in which the name of Christ and His religion was held by these people. However that was the religion of Lygia, and for that reason he was ready to embrace it. The more he improved, the clearer came to him the recollection of the series of events that transpired since that night at Ostrianum, the new conceptions that had formed in his head, and he wondered the more at the superhuman power of that religion, which so radically changes the human soul. If that religion could spread throughout the world, and inspire it with its love and mercy, an epoch would be introduced reminding one of the reign not of Zeus, but of Saturn. He did not dare to question the mysteries of Christ. Eyewitnesses of these, who related them to him, were too truthful, despised falsehood too much to doubt their words. Finally, Roman skepticism permitted disbelief in gods, but not in miracles. This was a puzzle to Vinicius which he could not unravel. At the same time these teachings seemed to him opposed to the existing state of things, inapplicable to life, and therefore mad. The teachings are bound to undermine, as Vinicius says, the dominion of Rome, and what would become then of Roman power? That Rome should come down to the level of the nations it had conquered, and treat them as equals, was more than the patrician could allow. Moreover, these teachings clashed with his tastes, his habits, character, and his conceptions of life. He feared them, wondered at them, but his nature revolted against them, and he hated them all the more because they stood between him and Lygia. He could understand, however, that they made Lygia's face more beautiful, which besides love, incited in him admiration and respect; besides passion, homage; had made her the dearest creature to him. And again he wished to love Christ, and he clearly understood that he could not be indifferent, but must either love or hate Him. Thus under the clashing thoughts and feelings, he involun-

tarily bowed his head, and paid homage to Him because he was Lygia's God.

Lygia saw how his nature was rejecting Christ, and if she was mortally grieved, she was also irresistibly drawn toward him because of the silent homage he paid Christ. The thought of the necessity of separating from him was the source of unspeakable pain to her. At times she thought that his soul would yet open to Christ's truth, but the illusion did not last long. Vinicius a Christian! She knew him too well, inexperienced though she was, to seriously entertain the idea. If the thoughtful Aulus could not be converted by the wise and perfect Pomponia, who could hope that Vinicius would become a Christian? The only answer to this was, that for him there was no hope, no salvation.

And here Lygia noticed with dread that this sentence, hanging over him and condemning him to eternal perdition, instead of repulsing her from him, made him only the more dear to her. She often thought of telling him that there is no life beyond Christian teaching; and when she had seated herself by his side and told him that, he rose leaning upon his sound elbow, and lowering his head on her knees, said: "Thou art life." Then her breath grew short, her strength left her, and a voluptuous quiver passed through her body. Taking hold of his temples she tried to raise his head, but also bent her own so that her lips touched his hair.

In a transport of delight, which lasted a few moments, they both struggled with themselves, their love, which urged them one to the other. Lygia sprang up and ran away, feeling fire in her veins and a dizziness in her head. That was the last drop that made the filled cup overflow. Vinicius did not know how dearly he would have to pay for the happy moment, but Lygia understood that she herself was in need of help. She passed all that night in tears and in prayer, which, she feared, did not deserve to be heard. Next morning she called out Crispus into the little ivy-covered bower, opened to him her whole soul, and begged him to go with her from the house of Miriam; for she was afraid to trust herself, and could not overcome her love for Vinicius.

Crispus, the old, severe and ecstatic man, approved Lygia's intention of leaving Miriam's house, but could not find words of forgiveness for what he considered her sinful love. His soul was filled with indignation at the very

thought that Lygia, whom he protected from the moment of her flight, whom he loved, strengthened in the faith, and on whom he looked as on a white lily that has grown up on the field of Christian teaching undefiled by any earthly breath, could have found place in her soul for love other than heavenly. He had thought that in the whole world no purer heart was beating with love for Christ than hers, and meant to offer it as a pearly sacrifice to Him, as a precious piece of His own handiwork; and the disappointment filled him with grief and amazement.

"Go and pray to God to forgive thy faults," he said, sternly. "Flee before the evil spirit work thy utter ruin, and before thou deny thy Saviour. God died for thee on the cross to redeem thy soul with his own blood, and thou wouldst love him who wanted to make thee his concubine. God saved thee by a miracle, and thou hast opened thy heart to impure desire, and hast loved a son of darkness. Who is he? The friend and servant of Antichrist, his associate in wantonness and crime. Whither will he take thee if not to that abyss, to that Sodom in which he himself lives, and which God will destroy with the fire of his anger. And I say to thee, that I would rather that thou hast died, that the walls of this house had fallen on thy head, before that serpent had crawled into thy breast and defiled it with the poison of iniquity."

He was borne away more and more. Lygia's failing filled him not only with anger, but also with disgust and contempt for all human nature, and particularly for that of woman, whom even Christian teaching could not save from Eve's weakness. It mattered little to him that the girl remained pure, that she wanted to flee from that love, which she confessed with contrite heart. Crispus wanted to make an angel of her, and raise her to heights where only love of Christ existed, and she had fallen in love with an Augustinian. No, he could not forgive her that! Words of anger burned his lips like red-hot coals. Lygia felt guilty, but not to such a degree; she even thought it would be a victory over temptation and lessen her guilt if she fled from the house of Miriam. Crispus shattered her every hope; he showed her the imperfection and misery of her soul, which she never suspected before. She even thought that the old presbyter, who fathered her since her flight, would console, encourage, and strengthen her.

"I offer to God my deceived hope and affliction," he con-

tinued, "but thou hast deceived the Saviour, for thou hast sunk in the mire, whose miasma has poised thy soul. Thou mightst have consecrated it to Christ as a precious vessel, and said to Him: 'Fill it, O Lord, with grace!' but thou hast preferred to offer it to the servant of the evil spirit. May God forgive thee, and have mercy on thee; for till thou cast out that serpent, I, who held thee as chosen"—

He suddenly ceased to speak, for he saw through the evergreen ivy two figures, one of whom he recognized as Peter the Apostle. The other he could not distinguish because his face was partly concealed by a coarse, hair-woven cilicium. For a moment Crispus thought it was Chilo.

Peter and his fellow-traveler, hearing the voice of Crispus, entered the bower, and seated themselves on the stone bench. Peter's companion removed his cilicium and disclosed a bald head, fringed with thin grey hair, with red eyelashes and a crooked nose,—an ugly and inspired face. Crispus recognized him as Paul of Tarsus.

Lygia threw herself on her knees in despair, and hiding her tortured head in the folds of his cloak, remained thus in silence.

"Peace to thy soul!" said Peter.

Seeing the girl at his feet, he asked the meaning of it. Crispus related all that she had confessed to him, while Lygia embraced the Apostle's feet, as if imploring for the slightest compassion.

The Apostle listened to the end, then stooped and placed his withered hand on Lygia's head, and raising his eyes to the old priest, said:

"Crispus, knowest thou not that our beloved Lord was at a wedding feast in Cana, and blessed love between man and woman?"

Crispus's hands dropped, and he looked with astonishment at the Apostle. Peter resumed:

"Crispus, thinkst thou that Christ, who allowed Mary Magdalen to lie at his feet, and who forgave the public sinner, would turn from this child, who is as pure as a field lily?"

Lygia, with sobs, pressed closer to his feet. She understood that it was not in vain that she sought protection from him. The Apostle raised her tear-covered face, and said to her:

"While the eyes of the one thou lovest are not open to the light of truth, avoid him, that he may not lead thee

into sin; but pray for him, and know that there is no sin in thy love, and as thou wouldst escape temptation, this will be accounted as a merit. Do not despair, nor weep, for I tell thee, that the grace of the Redeemer is with thee, and thy prayers will be heard; and after sorrow will come days of gladness."

Placing his hands on her head and raising his eyes to heaven, he blessed her. His face was lit up by an unearthly meekness. The crushed Crispus began to justify himself:

"I have sinned against mercy," he said, "but I thought that taking to her heart a worldly love, she denied Christ."

To which Peter answered:

"Three times I denied Him, still He forgave me, and commanded me to feed His sheep."

"And also because," concluded Crispus, "Vinicius is an Augustian."

"Christ softened harder hearts than his," said Peter.

Paul of Tarsus, who hitherto was silent, pointed at himself and said:

"I it was who persecuted and drove the servants of Christ to their death. When Stephen was killed, I stood guard over the garments of those who stoned him; I wanted to crush the truth in all lands inhabited by people, and still God destined me to preach His Word in all these lands. And I preached it in Judea, in Greece, on the islands, and in this ungodly city, when I as prisoner, dwelt in it. And now when Peter, our shepherd, has called me, I will enter this house, and bend this proud head to the feet of Christ, sow a seed on this stony field, which God will soften that it may bring forth a rich harvest."

And he rose. This little man with bent shoulders now seemed to Crispus to be what he really was,—a giant who will stir the world to its foundations, and will conquer lands and nations.

CHAPTER VI.

PETRONIUS TO VINICIUS:

"HAVE pity, carrissime, do not imitate in thy letters either the Spartans, or Julius Caesar. If thou couldst write, as he did, 'veni, vidi, vici,' thy brevity would be in order.

But the meaning of thy letter, after all, is, 'veni, vidi, fugi;' but as such a wind-up is contrary to thy nature, because thou hast been wounded, and uncommon things have happened to thee,—thy letter requires explanation. I could scarcely believe my eyes when I read that the Lygian killed Croton with the same ease that a Caledonian dog would kill a wolf in the gorges of Hibernia. That man is worth his weight in gold, and can easily become the favorite of Cæsar. When I return to the city I shall not fail to make his acquaintance, and will have a bronze statue cast of him. Bronzebeard will burst from curiosity when I tell him that the statue was made from life. Real athletic figures are very rare now in Rome and Greece, and still rarer in the Orient. Although the Germans are large, their muscles are covered with fat,—they are greater in size than in strength. Ask the Lygian if in his country people like him are the rule or the exception. In the course of our service we may have to give feasts, and, it would be well to know where to find such bodies.

"But praise to the gods of the Orient as well as of the Occident, that thou hast escaped from such hands unhurt. There are many points in thy letter which I cannot understand, and, to tell the truth, I understand neither the Christians, nor thee, nor Lygia. Do not be surprised that I, who care for little else in the world except my own person, should so carefully inquire about everything. I am the cause of all that happened; consequently it is to some extent my affair. Write soon, for I know not when we shall meet. Bronzebeard is as whimsical as the autumn winds. To-day he intends to go direct to Greece, and stay there. Tigellinus, however, advises him to return, if only for a little while, lest the people, in their longing for him (read: 'for bread and games') should revolt. Should the choice of Achæa prevail, we may want to go to Egypt. I strongly insist on thy coming here. A trip, and the pleasures here, will cure thee of thy present mood. But if thou do not find us here, a period of repose in thy Sicilian estate would be better for thee than staying in Rome. Write me minutely of thyself; and farewell. I have no wish to add this time, except health, for by Pollux! I know not what to wish thee."

Vinicius felt no desire to answer the letter, because he knew it would explain nothing. He felt an indifference to, and a consciousness of the vanity of life. Moreover, he

thought that some change had taken place in their relations; that Petronius would not understand him. He returned to his luxurious "insula" weak and exhausted, and at first enjoyed the rest amid the conveniences and luxuries that surrounded him, which did not last long, however. He soon felt the emptiness of the life he was leading, and that the interest in life he was taking was either imperceptibly vanishing, or has already vanished. He felt as if the ties that joined him to life had been cut. Then he thought that he could have gone to Beneventum, and then to Achæa, and life seemed prosy to him. "To what end? What purpose will it serve me?" These were the first questions that crossed his brain. For the first time in life, also, he thought that the conversation of Petronius, his ready wit, his brilliant thoughts, sharp and definite ideas, and his choice of apt words for every idea, might at the present time annoy him. On the other hand, he began to tire of his solitude. All his acquaintances were with Cæsar, and Vinicius was compelled to stay at home alone, his head full of thoughts, his heart full of feelings, which he could scarcely understand. At times he thought that if he had an opportunity of disclosing these feelings to some one, he might be able to reduce them to order, and analyze them. And in the course of a few days, he determined to answer Petronius's letter, and though he was not sure that he would send it, wrote it in the following words:

"Thou asked me to write minutely, and it is agreed; thou wouldst have me write more clearly, but I doubt my ability to do that, for there are many knots that I know not myself how to loosen. I have already told thee of my visit to the Christians; how they acted toward me and Chilo, whom they had the right to treat as their enemies; of the kindness with which they attended me, and, finally, of the disappearance of Lygia. No, my dear friend, I was shown clemency not because I was the son of a consul, for such considerations are foreign to them, because they also forgave Chilo, although I myself urged them to bury him in the garden. The world has never seen people like the Christians, nor heard teachings like theirs. I can say nothing more, and he who measures them with our yardstick, will surely err. I tell thee that they have been more solicitous about my well-being than my own people, or even my relatives would be had I been lying with a broken arm in my own house. Know also that Lygia is entirely unlike

others. Were she my wife or sister, she could not have been more tender toward me. Only love, I thought, could show so much tenderness. More than once did I read that love in her face and in her eyes; and thou wilt hardly believe that among those simple people, in that poor chamber, which served them, at one and the same time, as kitchen and triclinium, I felt happier than ever before. No, she was not indifferent to me. Still, that same Lygia left the house of Miriam to avoid me. I am wondering why she did so. I wrote thee, I think, that I promised to return her to Aulus, but she said that was impossible, first, because Aulus had gone to Sicily, and second, because the news of her return would reach the Palatine, and Cæsar might then take her from Aulus again. All that is true; but she knew that I would not use violence, that I could not cease loving her, that she would enter my house through a wreathed door, and be seated on a consecrated skin at my fireside. And yet she went away! But why? She was endangered. If she did not love me, she could have rejected me. On the preceding day I made the acquaintance of a strange man, a certain Paul of Tarsus, who spoke to me of Christ and His teachings, and with such force that at every word of his all the foundations of our world seemed to be crumbling to dust. After the disappearance of Lygia that man visited me, and he then said: 'When God shall open thy eyes, and remove the beam from them, as He removed them from mine, thou wilt feel that she acted properly, and then, perhaps, thou wilt find her.' And now I am racking my head over these words as if I had heard them from the mouth of the oracular priestess at Delphi. At times I think that I understand something. They, being lovers of mankind, are enemies of our life, our gods, and our crimes. Lygia ran away from me as from a man who, according to the Christian ideas, belongs to a criminal world, and with whom she would have to lead a criminal life. Thou wilt say that if she loved me, it could have been enough to reject me, without escaping. But what if she loved me? In that case she ran away from her love. At the very thought of that, I feel like sending slaves all over the city, and tell them to cry out in the houses: 'Return, Lygia!' But I cease to understand why she ran away. And finally, I should not have interfered with her belief, and should be willing even to erect an altar to her God. One new god would not be in my way,

especially since I am not a strong believer in the old ones. I am perfectly certain that Christians do not lie, and they say that He rose from the dead,—and a man could not do that. Paul of Tarsus is a Roman citizen, but as a Jew he knows all the ancient Hebrew writings; and he told me that the coming of Christ was foretold several thousand years ago. All these are very uncustomary things, but are we not surrounded by unusual things? Apollonius is still in the mouths of everybody, Paul asserts that there is no crowd of gods, but only one God, and this seems to me to be the just view. I think that Seneca, and many others before him were of the same opinion. Christ came, gave himself to be crucified, and rose from the dead. All that is perfectly true, and I do not see any reason why I should not erect an altar to Him, if I am ready to erect one to Serapis, for instance. I could even easily reject all the other gods, since no wise man believes in them, anyhow. But I think that that would not satisfy the Christians,—it is not sufficient, according to them, to worship Christ,—one must live according to His precepts; and here I am at the shore of a sea, as it were, which they command me to cross on foot. If I promised to do so, the Christians would hardly believe me. But how can I, even at the request of Lygia, raise Soracte or Vesuvius, or place Thrasymene Lake on the palm of my hand, or change the color of my eyes? It is beyond my power. I am not a philosopher, but neither am I such a fool as I might, perhaps, have seemed to thee. And I will tell thee this: I do not know how the Christians arrange their affairs, but I do know that where their teachings commence, there our dominion ends; there ends Rome, there ends the world, the difference between conqueror and conquered, between rich and poor, between master and slave: there ends government, there ends Cæsar, law, and the order of the world; and in place of these there appears Christ and a sort of mercy, which has not hitherto been seen; a kindness which is contrary to human and our Roman instincts. It is true, Lygia is more to me than all Rome, and if I could only see her in my house, I would not care if the whole world perished. But that is another matter. To them, the Christians, lip-worship is not sufficient; it is necessary to feel that it is good, and to have nothing else in one's soul. But I,—I take the gods to witness!—cannot feel it. Dost thou understand what that means? There is something in my nature

which shudders at the thought of that teaching, and though my lips were to glorify him, reason and my soul would tell me that I do it for the sake of Lygia, and that but for her, nothing in the world would be more repugnant to me. And, strange to say, a Paul of Tarsus understands it,—he understands it notwithstanding his simplicity, as does also that old theurgus, Peter, their head, and the most simple disciple of Christ. And knowest thou what they are doing? They are praying for me, and invoking what they call grace, while I am inspired with fear, and a greater yearning for Lygia.

“I have written thee that she left me; but when going she left me a cross, which she herself had woven from twigs of boxwood. When I awoke, I found it near my bedstead. It is in the *lararium* now, and I do not understand why I cannot approach it without awe and reverence. I love it because her hands made it, and hate it because it divides us. At times I think that this affair is pervaded with some enchantment, and that the theurgus, Peter, though he calls himself a fisherman, is greater than Apollonius and all his predecessors, and that it was he who enmeshed us all,—Lygia, Pomponia and myself.

“I have experienced the truth of Peter’s saying, that ‘Love’s ties are stronger than those of fear.’ My return home was not expected by my slaves, who thought that I was in Beneventum, and I found them all drunk in my triclinium. Their terror at seeing me was indescribable; some of them fainted, and they all fell on their knees imploring forgiveness. But what thinks thou did I do? At first I wanted to have them flogged and branded with hot irons, but—wilt thou believe it?—I felt ashamed, and was seized with a sort of pity for the slaves. For several days they were in mortal terror. On the third day I told them that I forgave them, and that to efface their fault, they should be more zealous in their service. They then fell on their knees, stretched their hands toward me, called me father, and instead of being spoiled by my indulgence, they are more conscientious in performing their duties than they ever were under the fear of punishment. I now see that at least in some cases the rule is applicable. I have verified it also with reference to my clients. Thou knowest that I have not been niggardly with them, but my father on principle looked down upon them, and taught me to treat them in a similar manner. But seeing their thread-bear

cloaks and macerated faces, I again felt compassion for them; called some one by name, inquired about the wives and children of others; and, as in the former case, tears came to my eyes, and it seemed to me that Lygia was looking on with gladness and approval. Either I am losing my reason, or love is upsetting my thoughts,—whichever it may be, I only know that I always feel as if Lygia was watching me, and that I am afraid to do anything that would grieve or insult her. Yes, Caius, so completely have I changed, that I often fear that, perhaps, I am no longer fit not only for counsel, for court, for feasts, but even for war. From the above thou canst judge that something is gnawing at my vitals, but I live in the hope of seeing Lygia, and shall not leave Rome, where I may be able to get some information about her from Glaucus or Paul. No, I will not leave Rome even were I offered the government of Egypt! I have ordered a tombstone for Gulo, whom I slew, in anger. Too late did I think that he carried me in his arms, and that it was he who first taught me to put an arrow on a bow. I know not why I should think of him at this moment, but I know that I think of him with sorrow and self-reproach. If what I write astonish thee, I reply it astonishes me no less, but I write pure truth. Farewell."

CHAPTER VII.

VINICIUS received no reply to this letter. Petronius evidently thought that Cæsar might command a return to Rome at any time, which was his reason for not writing. News to this effect had already been circulated throughout the city, arousing the delight of the rabble, who were all impatience for the games. At last Helius, the freedman of Nero, gave public announcement in the senate of his return. But Nero's return was slow, since he often disembarked for rest, or to witness exhibitions in theatres. He remained several days at Minturna. He even thought of returning to Naples to stay for the spring. During this time Vinicius had remained shut up in his house, his mind occupied with thoughts of Lygia, and such reflections as her strange religion had awakened within him. The visits of Glaucus, his physician, gave him no small pleasure, since he could converse with him about Lygia. Glaucus, without

knowing where she had sought refuge, could still give him assurance of her safety. On one occasion, when moved by the grief of Vinicius, he informed him that Crispus had been reprimanded by Peter for taking Lygia to task for her love. Vinicius was visibly moved on hearing this. He had often thought that Lygia did not love him. But now to hear from the lips of a Christian himself a confirmation to the contrary stirred his soul to its very depths. He felt in his gratitude like running to Peter and thanking him. Glaucus informed him that the Apostle was teaching in the neighborhood. Would not Glaucus accompany him thither? He would be most generous in his gifts to those of the community who were in need. He was even ready to do homage to Christ for Lygia's sake. Glaucus had many times urged him to receive baptism. He did not promise him that he should gain Lygia simply through this act, since he must accept religion for its own sake alone, out of his love for Christ, and not from other motives.

"One needs a Christian soul, as well," said he.

Though every obstacle that presented itself angered Vinicius, he now began to understand that Glaucus, as a Christian, was right in what he said. Formerly his estimate of people and things was largely influenced by his personal feelings, by his own selfishness, but he was now gradually accustoming himself to regard the opinions of others, and to understand that difference of feeling and sentiment that exists among different persons.

He began, too, to have a desire to see Paul of Tarsus. The discourses of that apostle had disturbed him, but he had arguments with which to combat his teaching. But Paul had gone to Aricium, and now that Glaucus did not visit him so frequently, the young patrician was left in solitude. He began to make frequent excursions through secluded streets in the vicinity of the Subura, and the narrow lanes of the Trans-Tiber, hoping that he might see Lygia. His heart wearied with each fresh disappointment. His former nature at times began to assert itself. He said to himself he would forget Lygia, since his love for her availed him nothing. He would seek to forget her in that distraction that the pursuit of pleasure brings.

The city, lately deserted, now began to put on new life as the return of Cæsar drew near. He was to be given a solemn reception on his return, and preparations for this purpose were in progress. Spring was already here, and

tempted by the warmer weather, crowds began to gather daily in all places of public resort, the Forums, the Campus Martius, and along the Appian Way. Under pretense of worshipping Juno or Diana, young women sought for pleasure or adventure beyond the city. One day on one of his excursions he saw the splendid chariot of Chrysothemis. It was surrounded by a crowd of young nobles and old senators whose duties kept them in the city. Her car was drawn by four Corsican ponies, which she herself was driving. She scattered smiles on all sides. But when she saw Vinicius she pulled up her horses, and took him into her car. She drove him to her house where a feast had been prepared which lasted all night. Vinicius drank so freely that he had no recollection of being taken home. He did remember, however, that he felt offended when Chrysothemis mentioned Lygia's name, and in his drunken stupor poured a goblet of Falernian over her. When he was sober again, however, he regretted what he had done.

Chrysothemis, cherishing no anger toward him, visited him a day later, and again took him to the Appian Way. She afterward supped at his house where she admitted to him that Petronius wearied her, as did also his lute player, and that her heart was now open to a new lover. She took care never to mention Lygia's name again, and though they met each other daily for a week, Vinicius could not forget the maiden. He always felt conscious that she was looking at him, and this thought stirred his soul with strange emotions. He suffered himself, nor could he help feeling that he was making Lygia's life sad as well. He had bought two Syrian damsels who aroused the jealousy of Chrysothemis to such an extent that he let her go somewhat unceremoniously. Seeing that whatever he did in the way of distraction could not make him forget Lygia for one moment, disgust and weariness of it all took possession of him. While pleasure had become loathsome to him, it also brought reproaches with it. He felt wretched in himself, and no longer recognized that because a thing gave him pleasure it was good in itself. He became morose and melancholic, and lost interest in everything, even in Cæsar's return. He did not even visit Petronius till the latter sent him litter for him with a pressing invitation.

His uncle greeted him cordially, but Vinicius took no interest in the questions he asked him. At last his pent-up feelings gave way, and to Petronius he narrated his search

for Lygia, his own life among the Christians, and everything which had happened to him while he, Petronius, was away from Rome. He confessed that he no longer felt interest in anything, that nothing attracted him, or gave him pleasure as formerly. He knew not what to do, or how to proceed. At one moment he felt like honoring Christ, and then again as if he wanted to persecute Him. While understanding the greatness of His teaching, he could not help feeling a strong dislike to it. Even should Lygia become his, it troubled him to think that she would still belong partly to Christ.

During this narration Petronius watched him narrowly, and he could not help noticing the marked change that had come over the young man. Approaching Vinicius he asked, while touching his hair :

"Dost know, Vinicius, that grey hairs show on thy temple?"

"Mayhap; it could not astonish me if all my hair were soon to turn white."

Silence followed this remark. Petronius, who was at times given to deep meditation on the mysteries of life, and of the soul of man, felt himself confronted by a series of spiritual disturbances in his friend, which he could not explain. He was a man of strong reason and good sense, and took time to think before replying.

"These must surely be enchantments, Vinicius."

"So I have thought, and more than once it occurred to me that we were both under a spell of some kind."

"Supposing," said Petronius, "thou wert to see the priests of Serapis? Among them are many deceivers, I have no doubt; but then there are those among them who are in possession of marvellous secrets."

While saying this, however, his voice betrayed a certain lack of belief in the efficacy of the counsel he offered.

Vinicius looked puzzled. "What enchantments can those Christians practice who derive, unlike many sorcerers I have seen, no profit thereby, and who do not use them to invoke any species of harm on their enemies. They live in poverty, teach obedience and submission, practice virtue and forgiveness, and have nothing but pity and mercy toward all. No, they have no need for enchantments."

Petronius found it necessary to use other and better arguments, though sorely puzzled what to say.

"The sect is a new one," he said at last. "Thou mayst

admire the goodness and the virtue of those Christians, but for all that I hold them not to be good. They are enemies of life; that is enough. Are not disease and death enemies of life. We have enough enemies without this addition. Of diseases, the state is full of them. There's Cæsar himself, Cæsar's poetry, Tigellinus, with cobblers who rule over the descendants of ancient Quirites, and freedman who occupy a place in the Senate even. I tell thee, the sect is a bad one. Come, hast thou not sought to banish this sadness, and draw from life some of the pleasures and delights it holds for thee?"

"I have tried, but to no purpose."

"Thou traitor!" cried Petronius, with a laugh, "hast thou not seduced my Chrysothemis from me?"

By a contemptuous wave of the hand Vinicius showed his disgust.

"I thank thee," said Petronius. "She shall have a pair of slippers with pearls for embroidery. In love's language that says, 'Walk away.' My gratitude to thee is twofold, first, for refusing Eunice, second, thou hast taken Chrysothemis off my hands. Behold in me, Vinicius, one who has practiced early rising, and followed those pursuits only that gave pleasure, yet who, even while possessing Chrysothemis, was often as tired of life as Cæsar, and at times unable to disengage himself from the gloomiest of thoughts. I bathed, I feasted, wrote satires, and at times even wrote verses as Cæsar does, yet I was not entirely free from sadness. And why was this? The answer is simple; having happiness and pleasure within my grasp, I neglected them, but sought them elsewhere, and found them not. A beautiful woman is a treasure in herself, but if she has love as well, her price is inestimable. Not even the riches of Verres can buy thee such a one. My latest philosophy is this: fill your life with happiness, as a goblet with the choicest wine, and drink till the hand becomes powerless. Let what may come after, I care not."

"This has always been thy philosophy."

"But lacking the substance which this possesses."

Saying this he called Eunice to him. She was draped in white, no longer like the slave that she was, but a very goddess of love and delight.

"Come," said Petronius, opening his arms.

She fell into his embrace. Seated on his knee, and with her head reclining on his breast, Vinicius marked how the

crimson mounted to her cheeks, and the eyes became soft and liquid. They presented to him a picture of love and happiness. Taking a handful of violets from a vase, Petronius scattered them over the head, bosom, and robe of Eunice; then pushing back the tunic till her arms showed bare in all their pure and pearly whiteness, he said,—

“Behold, Vinicius, what love is here revealed in this beautiful form! Happy the one who, like me, has found it. Look at her! Not even Praxiteles, or Miron, or Skopas, or Lysias, ever created such marvellously beautiful lines as you see here. There exists not in all Paros or Pentelicus such marble as this,—instinct with life, and warmth, and love.”

As he said this he passed his lips over her shoulders and neck. At their touch her flesh quivered, and her eyes closed and opened with an expression of the most intense delight. Petronius, raising her head, and addressing Vinicius, said,—

“In comparison with this what have thy gloomy Christians to show? If thou dost not know the difference, thou art free to go to them. But surely such a sight as this must cure thee.”

Vinicius was thinking just then that if it were only permitted to him to kiss Lygia in the same manner, and feel the warmth of her soft cheek resting on his shoulder, he could give up everything in life. The thought quickened his pulse, and caused his breath to come fast.

Petronius gave instructions to Eunice, who now withdrew.

“I offered her her freedom, but canst thou imagine what her answer was? ‘I would rather be thy slave than the wife of Cæsar.’ She would not consent to be freed, but I did it without her knowledge. As a favor to me the pretor did not demand her presence. She does not know, however, that she is free, nor that when I die this house and all it contains, with the exception of my gems, shall belong to her. Love,” he added, pacing up and down the room, “works marvellous changes: it has even changed me, Vinicius. I once loved the odor of verbenas, but since Eunice prefers violets, I now adore them above all other flowers.” Then stopping before Vinicius, “thou keepest always to nard, I suppose?”

“Peace, Petronius,” said the young man.

“My purpose in wishing thee to see Eunice was to show

thee how near love and happiness may be to one without their knowing it. Among thy slaves, who knows but thou mayest be able to discover one who would love thee even as Eunice loves me, and to whom thou couldst give thy love in return? Thou sayest thou art loved by Lygia. That may be. But a stronger love draws her away from thee. What interpretation can be put on such love as this? No, my Vinicius, thy Lygia is not Eunice."

"True, Lygia is not Eunice, but I do not regard the difference between them the same as thou. To kiss Lygia's bare arms as thou didst those of Eunice were to me a certain sort of sacrilege. To me she is a vestal or a divinity, not to be defiled by an unclean touch. Love may have changed thy nostrils, as shown in thy preference for violets, but it has changed my soul. Even in my misery I would prefer Lygia to be what she is."

"Then no injustice is done thee. Still I do not understand the position."

"Because we no longer understand one another," replied Vinicius, feverishly.

There was another moment of silence.

"May Hades swallow thy Christians!" exclaimed Petronius. "They have filled thy soul with disquiet and unrest. May Hades have them all. Thou art in error in supposing their religion good, since good is what yields us happiness, and happiness is beauty, love, power. These they call vanity. Thou art also mistaken in thinking them just, since if they pay good for evil, what shall they return for good? If we pay the same for one as the other, why need people be good?"

"The pay is not equal. According to their doctrine it begins in a future life which has no ending."

"We shall not discuss that question. But I hold the Christians to be simply incompetents. Ursus strangled Croton, because he was the stronger limbed, but these people are mopes, and to such the future cannot surely belong."

"Death with them is but the beginning of life."

"As well might one say, 'Day begins with night.' Is it thy intention to carry Lygia off?"

"No, she has done me good; I cannot pay it back with evil. Besides I have sworn that I would not."

"Is it thy intention to accept the religion of Christ?"

"I have a wish to do so, but my nature revolts against it."

"But wilt thou be able to forget Lygia?"

"No."

"Then go abroad, travel."

Just then the slaves announced that the repast was ready. On their way to the triclinium, Petronius said,—

"Thou hast seen something of the world, but only as a soldier on the march. Come with us to Achæa. Cæsar will stop at all places on the way, sing, receive crowns, plunder temples, and then back to Italy in triumph. It will be like a journey of Bacchus and Apollo. Augustians, both male and female, a thousand citharæ. By Castor! it will be worth seeing, since the world has not yet beheld anything to compare with it."

Here he seated himself on the couch beside Eunice, while the slaves placed a wreath of anemones on his head. Continuing he said,—

"The world is large, Vinicius, thou hast seen nothing in Corbulo's service, and there is much to be seen beyond the Tiber. I am to accompany Cæsar, and on his return I leave him to go to Cyprus. It is the wish of my golden-haired goddess, Eunice, that we make our offerings together to the divinity in Paphos, and her wish must be gratified."

"I am thy slave," answered Eunice.

"Then am I the slave of a slave. I admire thee for thy humility, though, divine one."

"Wilt thou not come with us to Cyprus, Vinicius? Only do not fail to see Cæsar. Thou hast not seen him since his return, and Tigellinus is not above using this to thy disadvantage. Thou art my sister's son, therefore he does not love thee. But we shall tell Cæsar that thou wert sick. Should he question thee about the maiden we must be ready with our answer. With a wave of thy hand thou canst tell him that she remained with thee till you wearied of her. Say that sickness kept thee at home also. Tell him that thy disappointment at not being able to hear him sing at Naples heightened thy fever, while the hope of hearing his divine voice later greatly helped thee toward recovery. Do not stop at the most flagrant exaggeration, else Tigellinus may outdo thee in this respect. Do not let him undermine thee. I wish I was not afraid of thy disposition."

"Knowest thou, Petronius, that there are those who fear not Cæsar, and whose lives are as calm and peaceful as if he did not exist?"

"Thou wouldst say the Christians, wouldst thou not?"

"Yes; it is only of them it can be said. We live in abject terror of Cæsar."

"And why do they not fear Cæsar? because they are not even known to him, perhaps. But Cæsar concerns himself not with them. Why should he? As I tell thee, they are incompetents, and it is that, being of different clay, which gives thee a repugnance to them. Trouble thyself nor me further with them. We know how to live and die; if they could do more it is unknown to us."

Vinicius was much struck with the apparent truth of these words. "We shall be able to live and die!" he kept repeating to himself after he reached home. Perhaps, after all, the goodness and charity of these Christians served merely to show their incompetency of soul. Their readiness to forgive now seemed to him but a sign of their weakness, since no one of strength and temper could forgive their enemies. They could forgive, it was true, but did they really understand the meaning of either true love or honest hatred.

CHAPTER VIII.

CÆSAR, on returning to Rome, was angry because he returned, and in a few days was fired again with the desire to visit Achæa. He even issued an edict in which he announced that his absence would be short, and that public affairs would suffer no detriment because of it. After this, escorted by a number of Augustians, among whom was Vinicius, he repaired to the Capitol to make offerings to the gods for an auspicious journey. But on the second day, when he visited the temple of Vesta, an event took place which changed all his plans. Nero did not believe in the gods, but was afraid of them; and he was especially filled with awe by the mysterious Vesta. When he beheld the goddess and her sacred fire, his hair stood up on end, his teeth chattered, a shiver ran through his limbs, and he leaned on the arm of Vinicius who happened to be standing near him. He was soon borne out of the temple and brought to the Palatine, where he recovered soon, but did not leave his bed the whole day. To the great astonishment of all present he declared that he postponed the

journey for an indefinite time, for the goddess had secretly warned him against haste. An hour later it was announced throughout Rome that Nero, seeing the saddened faces of the citizens, and being full of affection for them, as a father for his children, remains with them to share their sorrows and pleasures. The people, rejoiced at his decision, and at the same time believing that they would now miss no games and a distribution of bread, gathered in crowds around the gates of the Palatine, shouting in honor of the divine Cæsar, who interrupted the play of dice with which he was amusing himself with Augustians, and said :

"Yes, it was necessary to postpone the journey; Egypt, and predicted dominion over the Orient cannot escape me; hence Achæa too cannot escape me. I will give command to cut through the isthmus of Corinth; and will raise in Egypt such monuments that the pyramids shall seem childish toys in comparison. I will order to build a sphynx seven times the size of that which stands gazing into the desert outside Memphis, but on it shall be my face. Future generations shall speak only of me and of that monument"

"Thou hast already reared a monument to thyself with thy verses, not only seven, but thrice seven times greater than the pyramid of Cheops," said Petronius.

"But with my song?" inquired Nero.

"Ah! If man could only build for thee a statue like Memnon's, to resound with thy voice at sunrise! For all ages to come the seas adjoining Egypt would swarm with ships in which crowds of people from the parts of the world would be listening with rapture to thy song."

"Alas! who can do that?" answered Nero.

"But thou canst give command to cut out of basalt thyself driving a quadriga."

"Thou art right! I shall do it!"

"In this thou shalt bestow a gift on humanity."

"In Egypt I shall wed the moon, who is now a widow, and be a god indeed."

"And thou wilt give us stars for wives, and we will make a new constellation, which will be called the constellation of Nero. But do thou marry Vitellius to the Nile so that he may give birth to hippopotamuses. Bestow the desert on Tigellinus,—he will be king of the jackals."

"And what dost thou predestine for me?" inquired Vatinius.

"Apis bless thee! Thou has arranged for us such

splendid plays at Beneventum that I cannot wish thee ill :—make a pair of boots for the Sphinx whose paws must grow numb during night-dews ; then thou wilt make sandals for the Colossi which form the alleys before the temples. Thus each will find for himself a suitable occupation. Domitius Afer, for instance, will be treasurer, since he is known for his honesty. I am glad, Cæsar, when thou art dreaming of Egypt,—and I am sorry because thou hast deferred thy journey.”

Nero at once replied :

“Thy mortal eyes saw nothing, for the Deity reveals itself to whomever it wishes. Know, then, that when I was in the temple, she herself stood by me and said in my ear : ‘Postpone the journey.’ That came so unexpected that it frightened me, though for such an evident care of the gods for me I should be thankful.”

“We were all terrified,” said Tigellinus, “and the vestal Rubria fainted.”

“Rubria !” said Nero, “what a snowy neck she has !”

“But she blushed at sight of thee, divine Cæsar.”

“Yes, and I noticed it. Wonderful ! A vestal ! In every vestal there is something divine, and Rubria is so beautiful.”

He meditated for a moment, and then asked :

“Tell me, why do people fear Vesta more than any other divinity ? What does it mean ? Though I am the chief priest, fear seized me to-day. I only remember that I was falling back and should have dropped to the ground had not some one supported me. Who was it ?”

“I,” answered Vinicius.

“Oh, thou, stern Mars. Why wert thou not at Beneventum ? They told me thou were sick, and, indeed, thy face is changed. Yes !—I heard that Croton wanted to kill thee. Is it true ?”

“Yes ; he broke my arm—but I defended myself.”

“With the broken arm ?”

“A barbarian who was even stronger than Croton helped me.”

Nero looked at him with astonishment.

“Stronger than Croton ? art thou jesting ? Croton was the strongest of men ; now there is Syphax from Ethiopia.”

“I tell thee, Cæsar, that I saw it with my own eyes.”

“Where is that pearl ? Has he not become king of the Nemi ?”

"I know not, Cæsar; I lost sight of him."

"Dost not even know of what nation he is?"

"I had a broken arm, and could not, therefore, inquire of him about anything."

"Seek him and find him for me."

To which Tigellinus replied:

"I will occupy myself with that."

And Nero spoke further to Vinicius:

"I thank thee for having supported me. Had I fallen, I might have broken my head. Thou hadst been a good companion once, but during the wars and thy service under Corbulo thou hast become wild; I see thee seldom."

And after a moment's silence, he added:

"How is that maiden, whose hips are a little too narrow, the maiden thou hast loved, and whom I had taken from Aulus for thee?"

Vinicius became confused, but at that moment Petronius came to his aid.

"I will lay a wager, lord," said he, "that he has forgotten her! Dost thou see his confusion? Ask him rather how many he had since that time, and I will not assure thee that he can answer. Vinicius is a good soldier, but he is a still better game cock. He needs whole flocks. Punish, lord, for it and do not invite him to the feast which Tigellinus wishes to arrange in thy honor on the pond of Agrippa."

"No, I will not do that. I trust Tigellinus, and hope that flocks will not be lacking there."

"Could the Graces be absent where Amor will be present?" replied Tigellinus.

"Weariness gnaws me," continued Cæsar. "Through the will of the goddess I remained in Rome, but I cannot bear it. I will go to Antium. I am stifled here, among these dilapidated houses, in these dirty alleys. The bad smells reach even us, my house and my gardens. Oh, if an earthquake would destroy Rome, if some angry god would level her with the ground, I would show you then how a city should be built which is the head of the world, and my capitol!"

"Cæsar," replied Tigellinus, "thou sayest: 'if some god would level her with the ground,'—is it so?"

"It is. What then?"

"Art thou not a god?"

Nero waved his hand with an expression of weariness, and said :

"We shall see what thou wilt arrange on the pond of Agrippa ; and then I go to Antium. You are all little, and do not understand that I need immense things."

Having said this, he closed his eyes, giving to understand in that way that he needed rest. The Augustians departed, and so did Vinicius and Petronius.

CHAPTER IX.

PRETORIANS surrounded the groves on the banks of the pond of Agrippa, lest a too large crowd of spectators might interfere with Cæsar and his guests, and so it was said that everything in Rome distinguished for riches, wit, or beauty, was present at that feast, the like of which had never been in the history of the city. Tigellinus wished to recompense Cæsar for the postponement of the trip to Achæa, to outdo all those who had ever feasted Nero, and show that no one could entertain him as he could. With this aim in view, while being at Naples and afterward at Beneventum, Tigellinus made preparations and gave orders to bring from the farthest corners of the earth beasts, birds, rare fish, and plants, vessels and costly cloths with which to adorn the feast. The revenues of whole provinces went to satisfy mad projects ; but the most powerful favorite was not obliged to take expense into consideration. His influence increased every day. Tigellinus was, perhaps, not yet the dearest person to Nero, but he was becoming indispensable. Petronius excelled him in polish, learning and wit, and in conversation could better amuse Cæsar, but to his misfortune he excelled Cæsar in all this, and therefore roused his jealousy. Moreover, Petronius could not be an obedient instrument of Cæsar, and the latter feared him whenever matters of taste were in question, but with Tigellinus he never felt any restraint. The very title, *Arbiter Elegantiarum*, which had been given to Petronius, disturbed Nero's egotism ; for who else, if not he, deserved to bear it ? Tigellinus, however, had sense enough to understand his own deficiencies, to know that he could compete neither with Petronius, nor with Lucan, nor with the others distinguished by birth, talents, or learning ;

hence he decided to extinguish them by the suppleness of his services, and above all by such magnificence that the imagination of Nero himself would be struck by it.

He ordered a gigantic raft to be built of gilded timbers. The borders of this raft were embellished with beautiful shells, gathered in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean,—shells brilliant with all the colors of the rainbow. The edges of the raft were covered with groups of palm, and whole groves of blooming lotus and roses, among which played fountains of perfumed water, surrounded by statues of gods, and by gold or silver cages filled with birds of various colors. In the centre rose an immense tent of Syrian purple supported by silver columns,—or rather, the top of a tent in order not to conceal the feasters, under which tables were gleaming like suns, prepared for the guests, and loaded with Alexandrian glasses, crystals and vessels beyond price plundered in Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor. The raft which, because of the various plants accumulated on it, had the appearance of an isle or a garden, was joined by gold and purple cords to boats shaped like fish, swans, mews and flamingoes, in which sat at manicolored oars, nude rowers of both sexes, wondrously beautiful, their hair dressed in Oriental fashion, or gathered in golden nets. When Nero, with Poppæa and the Augustians, arrived at the main raft, and sat under the purple roof, the boats moved, the oars struck the water rhythmically, the golden cords stretched, and the raft with the feasting guests began to move and describe circles on the pond. Smaller boats and rafts surrounded it, filled with women playing on citharæ and harps, women whose rosy bodies, on the blue background of the sky, in the reflection of the golden instruments seemed to absorb that blue and those colors, and to change and bloom like flowers.

The feast was splendid. Hundreds of naked women from the greatest houses of Rome, slave-maidens, music on the rafts and in the groves on the banks of the pond, wine, the most costly viands, laughter, singing, nymph-chasing, kissing, drunkenness, debauchery—nothing was missing there. Nero himself was astonished at the magnificence, and so were all. In fact, Rome had not seen anything of the kind.

Vinicius was not drunk, as on Cæsar's feast at which Lygia was present; but he was roused and intoxicated by all that went on around him, and was at last seized by the fever of pleasure. Rushing into the wood, he ran, with

others, examining which of the dryads seemed to him the most beautiful. Every moment new flocks raced around him, pursued by fauns, satyrs, senators, knights, and by sounds of music. Seeing at last a band of maidens led by one of them arrayed as Diana, he sprang to it, wishing to look at the goddess more closely, when all at once his heart sank in his bosom. It seemed to him that in the goddess, with the moon on her forehead, he recognized Lygia.

They soon encircled him in a mad whirl and, in a moment, wishing evidently to incline him to follow, ran away like a herd of deer. But Vinicius remained on his place with a beating heart, breathless, for though he saw that Diana was not Lygia, and that, when closely looked at, she was not even like to her, but the too great excitement deprived him of strength. He was again seized with a longing for Lygia, a longing stronger than he had ever felt before, and the love for her flooded his heart with a new immense wave. Never before had she seemed to him so dear, so pure and beloved as now in that forest of madness and debauchery. He decided to run away from there. But he scarcely had time to move when before him stood some veiled figure, and, placing its hands on his shoulders, began to whisper, bathing his face with her burning breath.

"I love thee! Come! No one will see us. Hasten!"

Vinicius awakened, as it were, from a dream:

"Who art thou?"

But she placed her breast on him, and continued to whisper:

"Hie thee! See how lonely it is here, and I love thee. Come!"

"Who art thou?" repeated Vinicius.

"Guess!"

Saying this, she pressed through the veil, her lips to his, and drew his head to hers till breath failed her in the end and she let it go.

"A night of love!—a night of madness!" she said, catching the air quickly. "It is permitted to-day! Take me!"

But that kiss scorched Vinicius, and filled him with a new feeling of restlessness. His heart and soul were somewhere else, and in the whole world no other being existed for him except Lygia.

And, pushing away the veiled figure, he said:

"Whoever thou be, I love another and do not wish thee."

"Lift the veil," she said, lowering her head toward him.

At that moment the leaves of the nearest myrtles began to rustle; the figure vanished like a dream vision,—only her laughter was heard from afar, somewhat strange and ominous.

Petronius stood before Vinicius.

"I have heard and seen everything," he said.

"Let us go hence," replied Vinicius.

And they went. They passed the luparina, gleaming with light, the grove, the line of mounted pretorians, and reached the litters.

"I will go to thee," said Petronius.

And they sat down together. But on the way both were silent. And only when they were carried into the atrium of Vinicius's house did Petronius ask:

"Dost thou know who she is?"

"Rubria?" asked Vinicius, frightened by the very thought that Rubria was a vestal.

"No."

"Who then?"

Petronius bowed his head:

"The fire of Vesta was defiled, for Rubria was with Cæsar. But with thee was speaking,"—and he finished in a still lower voice,—*"the divine Augusta."*

A moment of silence followed:

"Cæsar," said Petronius, "was unable to hide from Popæa his desire for Rubria; therefore she wished perhaps to avenge herself. I hindered you both because, if thou, recognizing Augusta, wouldst refuse her, thou wouldst be ruined,—thou, Lygia, and, I perhaps, too."

"I have enough of Rome, Cæsar, feasts, the Augusta, Tigellinus, and all of you! I am stifling. I cannot live any longer in this fashion. I cannot! Dost thou understand?"

"Vinicius, thou art losing thy head, thy judgment, and thy moderation!"

"I love only one in the whole world."

"Then what of it?"

"This:—as I wish no other love, I do not wish your life, your shamelessness, and your crimes!"

"What is taking place in thee? Art thou a Christian?"

The young man seized his head with both hands, and repeated as if in despair:

"Not yet! not yet!"

CHAPTER X.

PETRONIUS shrugged his shoulders with dissatisfaction as he returned home. It seemed clear to him, that he and Vinicius no longer understood one another. At one time he had exercised great influence over him; had been his model in all things; and generally, it only required a few satirical words from Petronius to persuade Vinicius to anything. But now all this was changed; and the change was of such a character, that Petronius felt the means he had hitherto used, would be useless against the changed principles of Vinicius, since his love for Lygia and his contact with the Christian community. Experienced, as he was, he knew he no longer possessed the secret to Vinicius's soul, and this knowledge filled him with disquietude and anxiety, which recent events considerably heightened. "If this whim of Poppæa's is not a mere passing fancy, but a more lasting desire," thought Petronius, "one of two things must happen,—either that Vinicius will yield, and be possibly ruined, or, what is more likely now, he will resist, and in that case be most certainly ruined. I may also be involved because of our kinship, and also because the Augusta will now use all her influence on the side of Tigellinus. In either case it is bad." Petronius was a brave man and did not fear death, though he had no wish to draw it upon himself since he had had nothing to hope for from it. After much thought, he came to the conclusion that the best and safest plan would be for Vinicius to be sent on a journey. If he could give him Lygia, as a companion, he would gladly do so, but he hoped he would be able to persuade him to take the journey without her. He would cause it to be reported on the Palatine that Vinicius was sick, and so avert the threatened danger from them both. The Augusta was not sure that Vinicius had recognized her; she might think he had not done so, and in that case her vanity would not be hurt. Another time it might be different, and they must avoid danger.

He determined, therefore, to watch Vinicius and endeavor to persuade him to take the journey. For many days he thought that if he could obtain an edict from Cæsar

to banish all Christians from Rome, Lygia would go with the rest and then Vinicius would follow. Persuasion would not be necessary. It was not an impossible thing, for not very long ago Claudius had expelled the Jews, so, why should not Nero banish the Christians? Their absence would give more room in the city. Petronius now saw Nero every day, either on the Palatine or in other houses. It would not be a difficult matter to suggest this, and Nero never objected to anything which brought misfortune on others. Petronius laid down a plan for himself, after careful deliberation. At a feast, that he would give in his own house, he would persuade Cæsar to issue such an order. He even hoped to have given to him the execution of the edict. Lygia should be sent away in a manner worthy of her station, and that of Vinicius, to some such place as Baïæ, where they could love and play at Christianity as much as they pleased.

In the meantime he called upon Vinicius often, for, in spite of all his selfishness he was genuinely fond of the young tribune, and began to urge him to take the journey. Vinicius did not appear on the Palatine, pretending sickness. Finally, Cæsar himself informed Petronius that in three days he would depart for Antium. On the following morning Petronius went directly to give this information to Vinicius, who showed him a list brought to him that morning by one of Cæsar's freedmen. This list contained the names of all those invited to Antium.

"My name is here; and thine also," said he. "Thou wilt find one awaiting thee on thy return."

"If I were not among those invited," replied Petronius, "it would signify that I must die; and I do not think that will happen before the journey to Achæa. I am too necessary to Cæsar. We have scarcely returned to Rome," said he, examining the list, "when we have to leave it again, and trail over the road to Antium. It is necessary to go, however, for this is more a command than an invitation."

"And if one were not to obey?"

"He would have another kind of invitation to go a much longer journey—from whence there is no return."

"It is a pity thou didst not follow my advice and leave Rome before this. Now thou will have to go to Antium."

"I must go to Antium. What times we live in!—what vile slaves we are!"

"Is this the first time thou hast noticed it?"

"No. But thou hast endeavored to show me that the teaching of the Christians is an enemy to life; that it fetters it. Are their fetters stronger than these of ours? Thou sayst that Greece created beauty and wisdom, and Rome created power. Where is our power?"

"Call Chilo and converse with him. I am in no philosophic mood to-day. By Hercules! I have not made the times, neither do I answer for them. We will talk about Antium. A perilous path lies before thee, and it might even be safer to try thy strength with Ursus, than to go there; and yet thou must obey."

Vinicius, with a careless wave of the hand, replied,

"Danger! We all wander in the shadow of death, and every moment some one is engulfed."

"Shall I give thee the names of all those sensible ones who managed to live eighty and ninety years, notwithstanding the perilous times of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero? Take Domitius Afer as an instance. He has reached old age quietly, although his life has been full of crime and villainy."

"Perhaps that is the reason," answered Vinicius.

Then, glancing over the list, he read: "Tigellinus Vatinus, Sextus Africanus, etc. What a gathering of rogues and scoundrels!"

"True," said Petronius, "but let us speak of more important matters. Listen to me. I have spread the report on the Palatine that thou art sick and not able to leave thy house; and yet thy name is on the list. This shows that my report is not believed by some one. To Nero it matters nothing; thou art only a soldier to him, understanding and caring naught for poetry and music, and to whom he can only converse about the races in the circus. It is Poppæa, then, who has caused the insertion of thy name, and that proves that her love for thee was not a passing fancy but that she seeks to gain thy affection."

"She is daring."

"True, since she may bring upon herself irrevocable ruin. May Venus inspire her, quickly however, with some other love; but now it is thee she wants, and it is necessary to be extremely cautious. Nero commences to tire of her, he would rather have Rubria now, or Pythagoras, but still he would take a most fearful vengeance on us, through motives of self-consideration."

"I knew not that it was she, who spoke to me in the

grove; thou wert listening. I said I did not wish her, because I loved some other. That thou knowest."

"I beseech thee by all the gods, do not lose utterly thy reason. How canst thou hesitate to choose, between a possible ruin and a certain one? I have told thee already, that there would have been no hope for thee if the vanity of the Augusta had been wounded. By Hades! if thou hast grown tired of living, open a vein or throw thyself on a sword at once, for if thou makest an enemy of Poppæa, a worse fate may overtake thee. Once, I could converse with thee better. What would such an affair matter to thee? would it prevent thee from loving thy Lygia? Forget not, also, that Lygia was seen by Poppæa on the Palatine, and she will readily guess for whom thou dost disdain such lofty condescension; and then she will find Lygia even from under the earth. Thou wilt involve Lygia in ruin as well as thyself. Dost thou comprehend?"

But the thoughts of Vinicius seemed to be afar off. He only said,

"I must see her."

"Who? Lygia?"

"Lygia."

"Dost thou know where to find her?"

"No."

"And thou wilt begin again to seek her in cemeteries and beyond the Tiber?"

"I know not, but I must see her."

"Well, if she is a Christian, she may prove to have clearer judgment than thou, unless she seeks to ruin thee."

"She saved me from death at the hands of Ursus," said Vinicius, shrugging his shoulders.

"Then be quick about it, for Nero will not put off his departure from Rome, and he can issue death sentences as well in Antium."

But Vinicius was not listening. He could only anticipate an interview with Lygia, and wonder how he could arrange one.

Just then something occurred that solved the difficulty. Chilo entered suddenly. He was ragged, worn and hungry looking; but the servants, who before had received commands to give him admittance whenever he came, readily gave him entrance. He went directly to Vinicius in the atrium, and said:

"May the gods make thee immortal!"

At first, Vinicius felt inclined to order him to be put out, but the thought that perhaps the Greek could impart some information of Lygia, restrained him.

"Is it thou," he asked. "What has befallen thee?"

"Misfortune, O son of Jove," replied Chilo. "Virtue, nowadays, is a commodity which no one requires, and a true philosopher must be thankful, if but once in a day, he has the wherewithal to purchase a sheep's head to eat in his garret and moisten with his tears. Ah, Lord! That which thou gavest me, I paid to Atractus for books, and what was left, the slave whom I got as a scribe fled away with. I am wretched, and am come to thee for aid, O Baal! and I bring thee besides my misery and my tears, information I have collected for thee. I know where to find the divine Lygia, and will conduct thee to the house."

Vinicius was greatly moved on hearing this, but repressing himself, said;—

"Where is she?"

"She is in the house of Linus an elder among the Christians. Ursus is there also, and still goes to the miller Demas. As he works during the night, he would be out of the way if thou shouldst surround the house then. Besides Linus, who is old, there are only two old women."

"How dost thou know all this?"

"Dost thou not remember, lord, that I fell into the hands of the Christians and they spared me. True, Glaucus believed then, and still believes, poor fellow, that his troubles were of my bringing; but still he sought no revenge. Is it to be wondered at, then, that I am filled with gratitude? I am incapable of deserting or neglecting my friends. It would have been cold and indifferent indeed not to inquire about them,—where they were living, and their mode of life. At first, fear that they would misunderstand my motives, restrained me, but finally, my affection for them overcame this, and my courage was increased by the reflection of how readily they forgive injuries. But more than all, I thought of thee, lord. Our last effort was unsuccessful, so this time I made sure of victory well knowing thou couldst not reconcile thyself with defeat. The house stands alone and thy slaves could surround it so that escape would be impossible. It remains with thee now, lord, whether or no this daughter of a king finds herself in thy house this very night. And should it be so, thou wilt remember my father's miserable and hungry son."



"I THANK YOU MY GODS, AND YOU, TIGELLINUS."

Vinicius was strongly agitated; his whole frame trembled under the temptation. Yes! that was a good plan, and a sure one. If Lygia were once in his house, no one could take her away, and if once she became his mistress, there would be nothing left to her, except to remain so. What matters either Christian or any other religion! It is time to shake himself free from these feelings, and live as others live. Lygia must reconcile her fate with her religion. But these are all minor questions! The one important thing is, that she will belong to him—this very day. This religion of hers—will it stand firm against the luxury and temptations of the world? She may be his to-day; he can bid Chilo remain, and at dark have her conveyed to his house, and then everlasting bliss. In this manner all his sufferings and puzzling problems would end. He remembered that he had promised not to persecute her, but he had not sworn it; not by the gods for he did not believe in them, nor in Christ for he did not believe yet in Him. Then, if she felt herself wronged, he would marry her; he would feel compelled to do that, for he owed his life to her. The memory of that day, when he and Croton made the assault, rose in his mind; the Lygian in the act of striking; and the events that afterward happened. He saw her as he had seen her bend over him, dressed as a slave, but beautiful as a goddess; and unconsciously, his eyes wandered to the lararium where was the little cross she had made for him. Is he going to return all her kindness by further attacking her, dragging her by force to his house, like a slave? How can he do this? He loves her now, as well as desires her, and he loves her because of what she is. No! he felt it was not sufficient to merely possess her, he wanted her love, her consent, her soul. If she could come willingly to him, how enduringly happy they would both be; but he would forever destroy the possibility of that happiness if he were to forcibly take her now. The very thought of it terrified him. He glanced at Chilo, who grew fidgetty under his gaze; and an unutterable repugnance against this tool of his took possession of his soul; he would have liked to tread upon him, as on some venomous reptile. Quickly deciding what he would do, he now rushed to the other extreme, and turning to Chilo, said,—

“I will not do what thou hast advised; nor will I let thee go without giving thee a just reward. I will order three hundred lashes to be given thee.”

Chilo paled. Seeing the stern resolution on the face of Vinicius, he could not buoy himself with the hope that this was a jest.

He instantly fell on his knees and in a broken voice moaned,—

"How, O king of Persia? Why? Colossus of mercy! For what? I am old, hungry, unfortunate—have served thee—is this how thou repayest?"

"As thou didst repay the Christians," said Vinicius, calling the dispensator.

But Chilo threw himself at his feet, while the paleness of death crept over his features.

"O lord; I am old, command fifty not three hundred lashes. Fifty; one hundred, not three. Oh, mercy, mercy!"

Vinicius pushed him away with his foot, and gave the command. Immediately Chilo was seized by two herculean Quadi and dragged to the prison.

"In the name of Christ!" called out Chilo from the end of the corridor.

Vinicius was now alone. He tried to gather and arrange his thoughts. The mastery he had gained over his desires, relieved and comforted him. He felt that he had advanced a great step nearer to Lygia, and that he merited some reward. Of the wrong done to Chilo, he never even thought; that he had caused him to be whipped for the same things that he had before rewarded. If the thought of Chilo's sufferings had even occurred to him, he would have said that he had only punished him as he deserved. But he only thought of Lygia, and how she would be grateful, when she learned how he had punished the one who sought to do her harm.

But here he paused. Would Lygia commend what he had done? Her religion teaches forgiveness and the Christians had forgiven even a greater wrong. "In the name of Christ!" In his soul he was listening to those words now; Ursus had forborne to strike Chilo at those words; he would remit the rest of the stripes. He was going to call the dispensator to give the order, when the man appeared before him.

"Lord! the old man is unconscious and probably dead. Shall I order him to be flogged further?"

"Let him be revived and brought to me."

The chief of the atrium disappeared, but Vinicius waited

long before Chilo's revival was accomplished. Finally the slaves brought him in, and in obedience to a sign vanished.

Chilo was very pale and thin streams of blood flowed down his legs to the mosaic pavement. He had recovered consciousness, however, and fell on his knees before Vinicius.

"Thanks to thee, lord. Thou art great and merciful," said he, with outstretched hands.

"Dog!" said Vinicius, "know that I pardoned thee, because of that Christ to whom I owe my own life."

"O lord, Him will I serve, and thee."

"Listen! and keep silent. Rise! Thou wilt show me the house where Lygia dwells."

Chilo sprang to his feet, but a deathly pallor overspread his face, and in a faint voice he exclaimed,—

"Lord! I will go, but I am really hungry! I will go; but I lack the strength. Command me even the leavings of thy dog's plate, and I will go."

Vinicius commanded him to be given food, a gold piece and a mantle, but Chilo was too weak even to take the food. His terror was so great, lest Vinicius should command further flogging for what was really inability through weakness, and which he was afraid might be mistaken for obstinacy, that his hair stood on end.

"Only give me wine to warm me," he shivered, "and I shall be able to go immediately."

After awhile he regained strength to accompany Vinicius.

It was a long distance, for Linus dwelt as did most of the Christians, in the Trans-Tiber, not far from the house of Miriam. Chilo pointed out at last, a small house which stood alone and was surrounded by an ivy-covered wall.

"Here it is, lord."

"Now go!" said Vinicius, "but first listen to what I command thee. Thou hast to forget all, having served me, where these Christians live, and all else concerning them. Every month, at my house thou wilt receive from Demas my freedman two pieces of gold. But if thou seek to know more about the Christians thou shall be flogged or given up to the prefect of the city."

"I will forget."

But when Vinicius had passed out of sight round the corner of the street, he shook his clenched fists after him, exclaiming,—

"By Ate and the Furies! I will not forget."

Then he became faint.

CHAPTER XI.

VINICIUS went direct to the house where Miriam lived. At the gate he met Nazarius, who showed confusion on his face; but Vinicius pleasantly greeted him, and commanded him to escort the patrician to his mother's lodgings.

In the little cottage Vinicius found, besides Miriam, Peter, Glaucus, Crispus, and even Paul of Tarsus, who had just returned from Fregellæ. They were all astonished at the appearance of the young tribune, who said upon entering:

"I greet ye in the name of Christ, whom ye all honor."

"May His name be blessed for aye!"

"I saw your virtue, and am convinced of your goodness; and I come as a friend."

"And we greet thee as a friend," answered Peter. "Sit down, master, and partake of our feast as a guest."

"I will sit down and partake of your feast; but listen to me, thou Peter, and thou Paul, that ye may know my sincerity. I know where Lygia lives; I come here direct from the house of Linus. I have the right to Lygia, and that right was given me by Cæsar. In the city, and in my houses there are five hundred slaves, with whom I could have surrounded her dwelling and taken her; still I have not done so, and will not."

"Wherefore God's blessing on thee, and thy heart will be purified," said Peter.

"I thank thee; but listen to me further: I have not done so, though I am living in torture and anguish. Before I knew you, I should not have failed to take her, but your virtue and your teaching—though I do not profess it—have altered something in my soul, so that I do not even attempt violence. I cannot explain how it happened, but it is true. And now I come to you, who take the place of parents to her, and ask you to give Lygia to me as wife; and I swear to you that I will not only not forbid her confess Christ, but will myself begin to learn His teachings."

He stood erect, and spoke with a firm voice, but was agitated, and under the striped cloak his legs trembled. And to forestall an unfavorable answer, he continued:

"I know that there are many obstacles, but I love her as I love the apple of my eye; and though I am not a Christian yet, ye cannot call me your enemy, or the enemy of Christ. I want to be truthful with you, that ye may believe me. To me it is a question of life and death, but I am telling ye the truth. Another might say, Baptize me; I say, Enlighten me! I believe that Christ rose from the dead, because people who lead truthful lives say so, as say those who saw Him after death. I believe because I saw myself that your religion breeds virtue, justice, and mercy, and not crimes, as you are charged with committing. I know but little of your religion,—have learned something from you, from Lygia, from your works,—and still I repeat that I have somewhat changed by it. Before I knew you, I ruled my slaves with an iron hand, but I cannot do so now. I knew not what pity was; and now I know. I loved pleasure; and now I ran with disgust from the pond of Agrippa. I believed in violence, but have abandoned it now. Know ye that I do not recognize myself,—I am disgusted with the feasts, the wine, citharæ and the garlands; the palace of Cæsar, the nude bodies, and all crimes have become repugnant to me. And when I think of Lygia, who is like the snow of the mountains, I love her the more; and when I think that it was your religion that made her such, I love and desire it. But as I do not understand it, as I do not know whether I shall be able to live in accord with it, I am living in darkness and torture, as if I were living in a dungeon."

His forehead wrinkled with pain, his cheeks covered with purple, but he continued to speak with greater rapidity, and with increasing agitation:

"Know then that I am suffering from love and darkness. I was told your religion is inconsistent with life, with human happiness, with law, order, authorities, and Roman dominion. Is it true? I was told that you were mad. What bring ye into the world? Is it sinful to love? Is it sinful to be happy, to feel joy? Are ye enemies of life? Must a Christian be poor? Must I renounce Lygia? What is your truth? Your works and your words are like pure spring-water, but what is its source? Ye see that I am sincere. Dispel then the darkness which surrounds me. I was also told the following: Greece gave birth to wisdom and beauty; Rome, to power, but what bring ye? If there is light behind your doors, open them."

"We bring love," said Peter.

And Paul of Tarsus added:

"If thou spoke in the language of men and angels, but if thou have no love, thou would be as sounding brass."

But the heart of the old Apostle was moved by that soul, suffering like a bird in a cage, and frantically seeking to escape into the sunlight and open space. He held out his hand to Vinicius, and said:

"Knock, and it will open to thee. The grace of God is upon thee; and I bless thee, thy soul, and thy love, in the name of the Redeemer of the world."

Vinicius, hearing these words, ran to Peter. And here an uncommon thing happened. The descendant of the Quirites, who but lately refused to recognize foreigners as human, caught the hand of the Galilean and pressed it to his lips.

Peter was glad. He understood that the seed fell again upon fertile ground, and that his fisherman's net had caught another soul.

The bystanders were no less elated by this open expression of honor for the apostle of God, and in one voice exclaimed:

"Praise to the Lord in the highest!"

Vinicius rose with beaming face, and said:

"I see that my happiness lies in living with you, for I am happy now, and I think that you will convince me of other things. But this will not happen in Rome. Cæsar is going to Antium, and I must follow him, because I have been ordered. Ye know that not to follow means death. But if I have earned your favor, come with me and teach me your truth. In the crowd ye will be safer than I; ye will have the opportunity of teaching your truth in the very court of Cæsar. They say that Acte is a Christian; and there are many Christians among the pretorians, for I saw myself the soldiers bending their knees before thee, Peter, at the Nementan gate. I have a villa in Antium, and there we can gather and listen to the teachings of Christ in the shadow of Cæsar's palace. Glaucus told me that for the sake of saving one human soul you would go to the end of the world. Do for me that which you have done for those for whose sake ye have come from Judea,—do not desert my soul."

The Christians held counsel, and recognizing the important consequences that may result from the conversion of

an Augustian and a descendant of one of the oldest Roman families, have determined to send Paul of Tarsus with him. Peter, as the head of the flock, could not leave Rome. Vinicius, though sad because Peter, to whom he owed so much, was unable to accompany him, expressed his gratitude, and then turned to the old apostle with a last request.

"Knowing Lygia's abode," said he, "I could go and ask her, as is proper, whether she would consent to have me as husband should my soul become Christian, but I prefer to ask thee, Apostle, to permit me to see her, or take me thyself to her. I do not know how long I shall have to stay in Antium; no one near Cæsar is sure of the morrow. Petronius himself told me that I should not be entirely safe there. Let me see Lygia, that my eyes might feast on her; let me ask her if she forgot my evil and will share with me whatever good there is in me."

Peter smiled good-naturedly, and said:

"Who could justly refuse thee joy, my son?"

Vinicius again kissed his hand. The Apostle took the young man by the temples, and said:

"But do not fear Cæsar, for I tell thee that not one hair shall miss from thy head."

Then he sent Miriam for Lygia, and in a few minutes she returned leading Lygia by the hand.

Vinicius wished to run forth to meet them, but at the sight of that beloved creature, he felt his strength leaving him, and he remained standing, his heart beating, and without breath, a hundred times more excited than when he first heard the whizz of the Parthian arrow flying by his head.

Lygia came running into the room, and at the sight of Vinicius remained fixed to the ground. She grew purple and pale in turn. She threw wondering glances around her.

The Apostle approached her and said:

"Lygia, dost thou still love him?"

Her lips began to quiver like those of a guilty child, preparing to cry and to confess its guilt. But she was silent.

"Answer," said the Apostle.

With humility, and fear in her voice, she said, kneeling at the Apostle's feet:

"Yes."

Vinicius also dropped on his knees near Lygia. Peter placed his hands on their heads, and uttered,—

"Love each other in the Lord and to His glory, for there is no sin in your love."

CHAPTER XII.

IN the garden Vinicius, in few words from the depth of his heart, told Lygia all that he had a while ago confessed to the Apostle. He told her of the alarm he felt in his soul, what changes have taken place in him, and, finally, of the anguish that permeated his life since she left the house of Miriam. He confessed that he wished to forget her, but could not do so. He recalled the little cross made of box-wood twigs, which she had left him, and which he kept in his lararium, and revered as something divine. The Parcae weave the thread of life for others; but love, anguish and grief had woven it for him. He had acted wrongly, but his acts were the results of his love. He had loved her when she was in the house of Aulus, when she was on the Palatine, when he saw her in Ostrianum, where she was listening to the words of Peter; when he went with Croton to carry her away, and when she sat near his couch, and when she left him. Chilo, who discovered her hiding place, advised him to take her by force, but he had him punished, and went to the Apostle to seek the truth and her whereabouts. Blessed be the moment when that thought came into his head, for now she is near him, and will not flee from him, as she fled from the house of Miriam.

"Is it not true?"

"I did not flee from thee," said Lygia.

"Why didst thou go?"

She raised her iris-colored eyes to him, and bending her blushing face, she said:

"Thou knowest."

He was silent from a superabundance of happiness, then he spoke again of how his eyes were gradually opened; how she differed from all other Roman women, and only resembles, perhaps, Pomponia. He could not clearly explain it to her, for he could not himself clearly define his feelings. With her appeared into the world a beauty of a kind heretofore unknown,—she was not only a statue, but a soul. He also told her—and that filled her with gladness—that he loved her just because she had fled from him, and that she would be sacred to him at his hearth. He could not

speaking any longer, but caught her hands and looked at her with rapture, as if wishing to make sure that she was there, beside him.

"Oh, Lygia, Lygia!"

She told him in answer to his questions, that she had loved him while in the house of Aulus, and that if he had taken her there from the Palatine, she would have told Aulus of her love for him, and would have tried to allay his anger against Vinicius.

"I swear to thee," said Vinicius, "that it had never entered my mind to take thee from Aulus. Petronius will tell thee that I even then spoke to him of my desire to marry thee. But he ridiculed me, and suggested to Cæsar to take thee as hostage, and give thee to me. Many times I cursed him, but fate would have it so, happily; for otherwise I should not have known the Christians, and should not have found thee."

"Believe me, Marcus, that Christ designedly led us to Himself," answered Lygia.

Vinicius raised his head in surprise.

"True," he said. "Everything seemed to be so arranged that when I was seeking thee, I met the Christians. In Ostrianum I listened with amazement to the Apostle, for I had never heard such speeches. Didst thou pray for me then?"

"Yes," answered Lygia.

They passed the place where Ursus, after strangling Croton, threw himself on Vinicius.

"In this place," said the young man, "I should have perished but for thee."

"Do not speak of it," answered Lygia, "and do not blame Ursus."

"Could I revenge on him for defending thee? Were he a slave, I should immediately give him his freedom."

"If he were a slave, Aulus would long ago have freed him."

Vinicius told her that she would now be able to go and see Aulus, since his marriage to her would exclude Cæsar's interference. With the aid of Paul of Tarsus he would be baptized, acquire Aulus's friendship. There will be no further obstacles, and he will take her to his heart. Oh, carissima, carissima! Lygia raised her bright eyes, and said:

"And then I will say: 'Ubi tu Gaius ibi ego Gaia.'"

"No, Lygia," exclaimed Vinicius, "I swear to thee that never was woman treated with such respect in the house of her husband as will be thy share."

As they silently walked along, they looked like two deities, and as beautiful as if spring had brought them forth with the flowers. They stopped under the cypress near the little cottage. Lygia pressed against his breast, and he begged in a trembling voice to send Ursus to Aulus's house to fetch her things to his house. She blushed like a rose, or like the dawn, and said that it was contrary to custom, which required that a *pronuba** should carry those things behind the bride. He knew that, but she ought to do it for his sake. He wished to take them to Antium, where the things would remind him of her. Here he placed his hands together, and began to beg like a child:

"Pomponia will return in a few days; do it for me, diva, do it, dear!"

"Let Pomponia do as she likes," answered Lygia, blushing still more at the mention of *pronuba*.

Miriam appeared at the door and called them to breakfast. They sat down with the apostles, who looked upon them as the young generation that is destined to preserve and sow the seed of the new religion. Peter broke and blessed the bread. Peace was on the faces of the people, and an inexpressible happiness overflowed the room.

"Look," said Paul at last to Vinicius, "are we enemies of life and happiness?"

"Now I know, for I never was as happy as I am in your midst," answered Vinicius.

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT same evening, while Vinicius was on his way home through the Forum, he encountered the gilded litter of Petronius at the entrance to the *Vicus Tuscus*. Making a sign with his hand he stopped the eight powerful Bithynians who bore it, and drawing near the curtains, he exclaimed laughing at its sleeping occupant,

"I trust thy dream has been a happy one."

* A married relative of the bride who performed certain ceremonies at the wedding.

"Oh, is it thou?" said Petronius, waking. "Yes, I fell asleep for a few minutes, as I spent the night at the palace. I came out to try and find something to read as we journey to Antium. What news is there?"

"Dost thou come to visit the book-shops?" asked Vinius.

"Yes, I am getting some books for the journey, for I dislike to disarrange my library. There may be something new by Musonius or Seneca. I am trying also to find Persius, and a particular edition of the Eclogues of Vergilius, which I have not got. But I am weary and my hands ache from examining the volumes. I visited the shops of Avirnus and of Atractus on the Argiletum. I also went on the Vicus Sandalarius to the Sozii. By Castor! how sleepy I am!"

"Wert thou on the Palatine? I should like to hear the news from there. Or, stay—send home thy litter and the tubes containing the books, and accompany me home. I want to talk about Antium and other things."

"That is well," answered Petronius, alighting. "Thou knowest already, that we depart the day after to-morrow for Antium."

"How should I know that?"

"What world dost thou live in? Well, I shall be the first to give thee the news. Yes; be ready on the morning of that day. Peas soaked in olive oil have been of no use, neither has a thick cloth round his coarse neck, and Nero's voice is hoarse. Such being the case, delay is not to be thought of. He curses Rome, the atmosphere here and everything else. He would like to raze it to the ground or see it burned, and he yearns for the sea as soon as possible. He says he is being driven to his grave by the odors brought by the wind from the narrow streets. Sacrifices were made to-day in all the temples for the gods to restore his voice, and it will go hard with Rome and the Senate also, if they do not do so quickly."

"But in that case he would not need to go to Achæa."

"That is not the only divine gift possessed by Cæsar," said Petronius, smiling. "He would shine as a poet in the Olympic games with his 'Burning of Troy'; would be everything even to a dancer, and always win the victor's crown. This is what gave this mountebank his cold. Yesterday, he tried to rival our Paris in dancing. He portrayed the adventures of Leda, perspired and caught

a chill. He was as wet and slippery as a freshly caught eel. He changed masks continually, whirled round on his spindle legs, waved his hands as if intoxicated, until I was entirely overcome with disgust at his big stomach and little legs. Just picture to thyself Ahenobarbus as the divine swan, or Leda. What a swan it was! He wants to appear in that pantomime before the public in Antium, and afterward in Rome."

"But people do not like him to sing in public. To think of a Roman Cæsar appearing like a clown! No; Rome will not submit to that."

"My dear Marcus, Rome will submit to anything; the Senate will thank him as the 'Patron of his country,' and the vulgar herd will rejoice to have Cæsar to amuse them."

"Canst thou imagine anything more degrading?" Petronius shrugged his shoulders. "Thou dost remain at home, alone, thinking about Lygia or the Christians, so probably knowest naught of what took place two days ago. Nero married publicly, Pythagoras, who appeared as a bride. Was not that beyond the boundary line of madness? And, moreover, the flamens were called to perform the ceremony, which they did with solemnity. I was there, and though I can endure a great deal, I confess to wondering why the gods, if gods there be, did not give some sign. Cæsar has no belief in the gods, though, and he is right."

"So he combines in himself chief priest, god and unbeliever," said Vinicius.

"That is true," said Petronius, laughing. "It had not entered my head before; surely the world has never seen such a combination. And one might add, a chief priest who believes not in the gods, a god who reviles them, and an atheist who fears them. This was proved in the temple of Vesta."

"What a state of society!"

"It is with society as it is with Cæsar. But this state of things cannot endure."

In talking thus they came to the house of Vinicius who called cheerfully for supper, then he continued,

"No, my dear, there must be a new state of things."

"But we shall have no part in it," replied Petronius; "for the very reason that even now in Nero's time man's life is as fleeting as that of the moth,—a short time in the sunshine of Cæsar's favor, when the first cold wind of disfavor blows upon him, he perishes. By the son of Maia! I have

often asked myself this question: 'By what miraculous agency has Lucius Saturninus managed to live to the age of ninety-three, outliving Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius?' We will not think of that, however. Permit me to send for Eunice. My desire for sleep has left me and I would be merry. Command cithara players to the supper, and afterward we can speak of Antium. It is necessary for thy sake, that we do so."

Vinicius ordered his litter to be sent for Eunice, but declared he did not intend to bother himself much about the visit to Antium. "Let those worry themselves who exist only in the sunshine of Cæsar's favor. The Palatine does not comprise all the world, particularly to those whose souls are otherwise occupied." He spoke so carelessly and brightly, and seemed so happy, that Petronius was struck by it. He looked at him for awhile, then asked,

"What change art thou undergoing? To-day thou art like thy old self, when the golden bulla shone on thy neck."

"I am happy," replied Vinicius. "I brought thee here to tell thee so."

"What has occurred?"

"That which I would not exchange for the whole Roman Empire."

Saying which he seated himself, and leaning his head on his hand, asked,—

"Dost thou recall the time when we were at the house of Aulus Plautius and first saw that maiden of goddess-like beauty, whom thou didst liken to 'the dawn and the spring'? Dost recollect that Psyche who is fairer than all our maidens or goddesses?"

Petronius gazed at him in wonderment, as if in doubt of his sanity.

"Of whom speakest thou?" he said, at length. "Most certainly I recollect the fair Lygia."

"I am her betrothed."

"What?"

But Vinicius rose hurriedly, and called the dispensator.

"Summon the slaves before me to the last one."

"Thou art her betrothed?" repeated Petronius.

Before he had time to recover from his surprise, an immense crowd gathered in the atrium. Old men, men in the prime of life, women, boys and girls hastened in. In the "fauces" or corridors, the summons was given in different languages, and each moment the crowd thickened. When

all were in their places in rows along the walls, Vinicius took his position near the impluvium, and turning to his freedman Demas, said,—

“Let those who have seen twenty years’ service in this house go before the pretor to-morrow and they will be freed; those who have not served so long shall be given three pieces of gold and served with double rations for a week. Send to the prisons in the rural districts with orders to pardon and feed the people. Great happiness has come to me and I wish all to rejoice.”

They were speechless with surprise for a moment, then all lifting their hands, cried,—

“Ah! lord! a-a!”

Vinicius dismissed them with a sign, and they instantly obeyed, though they wished to fall before him and pour out their thanks. From cellar to roof the house rang with sound of rejoicing.

“To-morrow, I will bring them together again in the garden, and let them draw such signs as they please on the ground. Those who draw a fish shall be freed by Lygia.”

Petronius never allowed himself to be surprised long, and remarked, indifferently,

“A fish, is it? Ah, ha! I remember Chilo told us that is the sign of a Christian.” And holding out his hand to Vinicius, he added, “Happiness is as we see it. May Flora strew thy path with flowers these many years. I wish thee all that thou dost wish thyself.”

“I thank thee. I had a fancy that thou wouldst endeavor to restrain me and that would be wasting thy time.”

“I? Not at all. On the contrary, I think thou doest well.”

“Ah, traitor!” answered Vinicius, gaily. “Dost thou forget what thou saidst to me as we left the house of Pomponia?”

“No,” replied Petronius, coldly, “but my opinion has changed. Everything changes in Rome. Husbands change wives; wives, husbands; why not change our opinions? Acte almost became the wife of Nero, and to please him she was represented as being royally descended. Well; she would have made a virtuous wife and an honest Augusta. By Proteus! I shall change my opinions as often as I find it advisable to do so. Lygia’s descent is more assuredly royal than Acte’s. But beware of Poppæa in Antium.”

"I shall not think about it. I shall not lose one hair from my head in Antium."

"Thou canst not surprise me a second time. But how art thou so certain?"

"The Apostle Peter told me so."

"The Apostle Peter told thee! Then there is no gain-saying that. I will, however, with thy permission, take certain precautions, in order that the Apostle Peter may prove to be a true prophet, for should it turn out otherwise thou mayst lose faith in him."

"Do as pleases thee, but thou canst not take away my faith in him by speaking thus satirically."

"One more question. Art thou a Christian?"

"Not yet; Paul of Tarsus journeys with me, however, to expound the religion of Christ, and afterward I may receive baptism. They are not enemies of life and joy, as thou saidst."

"That is a good thing for thee and Lygia," Petronius replied, shrugging his shoulders. "But," he added, as if speaking to himself, "it is a marvel how expert they are in winning followers. How numerous they are becoming."

"Yes," said Vinicius, as eagerly as if he were one of the community. "In Rome there are thousands upon thousands, and in all the cities of Italy, and in Greece and Asia; in the palace of Cæsar even, and among the guards and pretorians. There are Christians in all classes of society, from the slave to the patrician. Pomponia is one, probably Octavia was also, and Acte is one. Christianity will spread all over the world, for by it only can the world be renewed. Shrug not thy shoulders, for thou dost not know but that presently, thou thyself wilt also embrace it?"

"I?" said Petronius. "By the son of Leto, No! Did it embrace all truth and all wisdom human and divine, I would not accept it. I should have to work, and that I do not like. I should have to practise self-denial, and that I will not do. Thou, with thy impetuous nature mayst easily be persuaded. But I? I love my jewels, my vases, cameos, and my Eunice too well. I have no belief in Olympus, but I make an earthly one to suit myself. I love the scent of perfumes and the comforts of my triclinium too well. I love the poetry of our gods, and I love Achæa, where I am to accompany our fat, thin-legged, divine Cæsar,—our august poetry-making Hercules, Nero."

The very idea of such a thing, as he, Petronius, embrac-

ing the doctrine of these fishermen from Galilee, amused him, and he commenced to chirp in an undertone the beginning of the Greek feast song,

“With the green of myrtle I will entwine my bright sword,
After the fashion of Harmodius and Aristogiton,”

but stopped as the nomenclator announced the arrival of Eunice. Supper was now immediately served, enlivened by the songs of the cithara players. Vinicius gave them an account of the visit of Chilo, and how he had conceived the idea of going at once to the Apostles during the flogging of Chilo.

On hearing this, Petronius, who again felt the desire for sleep creep over him, said :

“The idea was a good one, but I should have commanded five gold pieces to be given to Chilo ; but as thou hadst the desire to flog him, it was better to do so, for who can tell, but that at some time or other he will command the knees of senators as Vatinius our cobbler knight does to-day. Good-night.”

After his departure with Eunice, Vinicius repaired to his library to write to Lygia, as follows :

“I send this letter that it may greet thee with a ‘good-day,’ when thy most beautiful eyes unseal themselves from sleep. This is why I write thee now, though I shall be with thee to-morrow. After to-morrow Cæsar goes to Antium,—and I, cheu ! I am obliged to go with him. Thou knowest already, as I have told thee, that to disobey would be to endanger my life :—and at this moment I lack the courage to die. Yet, if it is thy wish that I should not go, thou hast only to write me one word, and I shall remain behind. A speech from Petronius will, I know, avert danger from me. In my delight I gave rewards to all my slaves to-day ; such as have been in my house twenty years shall accompany me to the pretor to-morrow to obtain their freedom. I shall look for thy praise in this, my dear, since I am sure it will commend itself to thy religious convictions. Besides, I do it for thy sake. It is thou whom they are to thank for their freedom. They shall know this from me to-morrow, so that they may show their gratitude to thee, and extol thy name. I sacrifice my freedom to happiness and thee. God grant that I may be ever thy slave. Cursed be Antium and this journey of Ahenobarbus ! Thrice and four times happier am I that I can

not lay claim to the wisdom of Petronius; if I could, I should be compelled perhaps to go to Greece. In the meantime each moment's separation will but sweeten my memory of thee. The moment I can tear myself away I shall spring on my horse, and hastening back to Rome shall have my eyes gladdened with sight of thee, and my ears charmed by thy voice. When not able to come I shall dispatch a slave with a message, and an inquiry as to how thou art. My divine one, I salute and embrace thee! Do not be angry that I call thee divine. Shouldst thou forbid it, I shall yield obedience to thy wish, but to-day I must address thee so. I send thee my congratulations on thy future home with all my soul."

CHAPTER XIV.

It was known in Rome that Cæsar wished to stop for a short time at Ostia on his journey, or, rather, to see the largest ship in the world which had brought bread recently from Alexandria, and from Ostia to go by the *Via Littoralis* to Antium. Order had been given already a few days ago, and therefore a crowd gathered at the *Porta Ostensis*—crowds made up of the local rabble and of all nations of the earth, and eager to feast their eyes on the procession of Cæsar, on which the Roman populace could never gaze sufficiently. The road to Antium was neither difficult nor long. In the city itself which was composed of splendid palaces and villas, it was possible to find everything required by comfort, and even the most exquisite luxury of those times. But Cæsar had the habit to take with him on a journey every object which might give him delight, beginning with musical instruments and domestic furniture, and ending with statues and mosaics, which were taken even when he wished to remain on the road merely a short time for rest or recreation. He was therefore accompanied on every expedition by whole legions of servants, without reckoning divisions of pretorian guards, and Augustians; of the latter each had a separate retinue of slaves. On that day, early in the morning, herdsmen from Campania, with goat-skins on their legs and sunburnt faces, drove forth five hundred she-asses through the gates, so that Poppæa on the morrow of her arrival at Antium might

have her bath in their milk. The rabble gazed with delight and ridicule at the long ears swaying amid clouds of dust, and listened with delight to the whistling of whips and the wild shouts of the herdsmen. After the asses had gone by, crowds of youthful slaves, after sweeping the road carefully, covered it with flowers and needles from pine trees. In the crowds people whispered with a certain pride that the whole road to Antium would be strewn in that way with flowers gathered in near-by private gardens, or bought at high prices from dealers at the Porta Mugionis. As the morning hours passed, the multitude increased more and more. Some had brought their whole families lest the time might be too tedious for them, spread their provisions on stones intended for a new temple in honor of Ceres, and ate their "prandium" under the open sky. Here and there were groups gathered around persons who had traveled. The topic was the present trip of Cæsar, his future journeys, and travels in general. Various persons talked of their trades; of distant countries, of far-off isles and hissing seas,—and also of the ship Cæsar was to look at, a ship which had brought wheat to last for two years, besides four hundred passengers, an equal number of hostages, and beasts which were to be used in the summer games. This produced general good-feeling toward Cæsar, who not only nourished the populace, but amused them. Therefore they were ready to greet Cæsar with enthusiasm.

Meanwhile a detachment of Numidian horse, who belonged to the pretorian guard, showed themselves. They were attired in yellow uniforms, red girdles and great earrings, which threw a golden gleam on their black faces. The points of their bamboo spears glittered like flames in the sun. After they had passed a procession-like movement began. The crowd pushed forward to look at it more nearly, but divisions of pretorian foot came, and, forming a line on both sides of the gate, prevented approach to the road. In advance moved wagons loaded with purple, red, and violet-colored tents, and tents of byssus woven from snow-white threads; and oriental carpets, and tables of citrus, and pieces of mosaic, and kitchen utensils, and cages with birds brought from the East, North and West, birds whose brains or tongues were to go to Cæsar's table, and vessels with wine, and baskets with fruit.

The objects which they did not wish to expose to bruising or breaking in vehicles, were carried by slaves. Hun-

dreds of people were seen carrying vessels and statues of Corinthian bronze; Etruscan vases were borne separately, so were the Grecian vases, the golden vessels, or the vessels of Alexandrian glass. These were guarded by small detachments of pretorian infantry and cavalry; over each division of slaves were taskmasters, armed with whips whose ends consisted of lumps of lead or iron. While looking at the sea of the musical instruments of Cæsar and the court, instruments gleaming beneath the sun in gold, bronze, precious stones, and pearls, which were carried past, one might think that Apollo and Bacchus had set out on a journey. After the instruments came rich chariots filled with acrobats, dancers of both sexes, grouped artistically, with wands in their hands. After them followed slaves intended, not for service, but excess: boys and girls from Greece or Asia Minor, with long hair, or with winding curls arranged in golden nets, children resembling cupids with wonderful faces, but faces completely covered with a thick coating of cosmetics, lest the wind might tan their delicate complexions.

And again appeared a pretorian cohort of gigantic Sicambrians, bearded, blonde and red-haired. In front of them went banner-bearers, called "*imaginarii*," carrying Roman eagles, tablets with inscriptions, statues of German and Roman gods, and finally statues and busts of Cæsar.

From under the skins and armor of the soldiers were seen limbs sunburnt and mighty, looking like military engines, capable of carrying the heavy weapons with which guards of that kind were furnished. The earth seemed to bend beneath their measured and weighty tread. After them Nero's chained lions and tigers were led by, so that, should the wish come to him of imitating Dionysius, he would have them to attach to his chariots. They were led in chains of steel by Arabs and Hindoos, but the chains were so entwined with flowers, that they seemed to be made all of flowers.

Then came the Emperor's vehicles and litters, great and small, gold or purple, inlaid with ivory or pearls, or glittering with precious stones; after them came another small cohort of pretorians in Roman armor, pretorians composed of Italian volunteers only, and again crowds of select servants and boys, and at last came Cæsar himself, whose approach was heralded from afar by shouts of thousands.

In the crowd was the Apostle Peter, who wished to see

Cæsar once in life. He was accompanied by Lygia, whose face was hidden by a thick veil, and Ursus, whose strength was the best defence of the young girl in the wild and boisterous crowd. The Lygian took one of the stones destined for the building of the temple, and brought it to the Apostle, so that by standing on it he might see better than others. In the beginning the crowd muttered when Ursus pushed it apart as a ship pushes waves; but when he lifted and carried the stone which four of the strongest men could not raise, the muttering turned into wonderment, and cries of "Macte!" were heard round about.

But at that moment Cæsar drew near. He was sitting in a chariot drawn by six white Idumean stallions, shod with gold. The chariot had the appearance of a tent with sides open, so that the crowd might see Cæsar. There was room in the chariot for a number of persons; but Nero, desiring that attention should be fixed on him exclusively, passed through the city alone, and only two deformed dwarfs were sitting at his feet. He was dressed in a white tunic, and in a toga of amethyst color, which cast a bluish tinge on his face. On his head was a laurel wreath. Since his departure from Naples he became somewhat corpulent. His face had grown wide; under his lower jaw hung a double chin, through which his mouth, which was too near his nose without it, seemed now to touch his very nostrils. His fat neck was, as usual, wrapped in a silk kerchief, which he arranged from moment to moment, with a white and fat hand grown over with red hair resembling bloody stains; he would not admit the epilators to pluck out this hair after he had been told that to do so would bring trembling of the fingers and injure his lute-playing. Infinite vanity was, as ever, written on his face, together with tedium and suffering. On the whole it was a face both terrible and ridiculous. He turned his head now on one side, now on the other, blinking, and listening carefully to the greetings. He was met by a storm of applause and shouts: "Hail, divine Cæsar! Imperator, hail, conqueror! hail, incomparable son of Apollo!"

When he heard these words, he smiled; but at moments his face, as it were, became clouded; for the Roman rabble was satirical and keen in reckoning, and allowed itself to criticise even those great triumphators whom it loved and respected. Nero's monstrous vanity could not endure the least blame or censure; meanwhile, in the throng, amid

shouts of applause were heard cries of, "Bronzebeard, Bronzebeard! where hast thou put thy flaming beard? Dost thou fear that Rome might catch fire from it?" And those who cried this out, knew not that their jests concealed a dreadful prophecy.

These remarks did not anger Nero over-much, because he did not wear a beard: long before he had devoted it in a golden casket to Jupiter Capitolinus. But other persons, hidden behind piles of stones, and the corners of temples, shouted: "Matricide! Nero! Orestes! Aclamaeon!" And others shouted: "Where is Octavia?" "Surrender the purple!" At Poppæa, who came directly after him, they shouted: "Flava coma (yellow hair)!" which name meant a street-walker. Cæsar's musical ear caught these words too, and he at once lifted his polished emerald to his eyes, as if he wished to see and remember the faces of those who shouted. While looking thus, his glance rested on the apostle standing on the stone. For a while those two men looked at each other, and no one in that brilliant retinue, and no one in that immense throng, thought that at that moment two powers of the earth were looking at each other, one of which would vanish quickly as a bloody dream, and the other,—that old man dressed in poor garments,—would seize in eternal possession the world and the city. After Poppæa, the Augustians, Petronius, Tigellinus, Licinianus, Vitellius, Vatinius, Licinus, Lecanius, Tullius, Senecio, and Vestinius, who passed by in magnificent apparel and splendid vehicles, and were praised or ridiculed by the throng according to their merits, Vinicius came, riding at the end of the retinue.

At sight of the Apostle and Lygia, whom he had not expected to see, he sprang out of the chariot and, greeting them with a radiant face, spoke with hurried voice, like a man who has no time to spare:

"Thou hast come! I know not how to thank thee, O Lygia! God could not have sent me a better omen. Greeting thee once more I take leave of thee, but not for a long time. On the road I shall dispose relays of horses, and every free day I shall come to thee till I get leave to return. Farewell!"

"Farewell, Marcus!" Lygia replied in a low voice, and added in a still lower voice: "May Christ go with thee, and open thy soul to Paul's word!"

And Vinicius was glad at these words, and glad that she

was concerned about his becoming a Christian soon ; hence he answered :

" My heart ! let it be as thou sayest. Paul prefers to travel with my people, but he is with me, and shall be my teacher and companion. Draw aside thy veil, my delight, and let me see thee before my journey. Why art thou thus hidden ? "

She lifted the veil, and showed him her bright face and her wonderfully smiling eyes, and asked :

" Is the veil bad ? "

And in her smile there was a little of childish opposition, and Vinicius, while looking at her with delight, answered :

" Bad for my eyes which till death would look on thee only. "

Then he turned to Ursus, and said :

" Ursus, guard her as the pupil in thy eye, for she is not only thy, but also my domina. "

Having said this, he seized her hand and pressed it with his lips, to the great astonishment of the crowd who could not understand signs of such honor from a brilliant Augustian to a maiden dressed in poor garments, almost those of a slave.

" Farewell ! "

Then he departed quickly, for Cæsar's whole retinue had moved forward considerably. The Apostle Peter blessed him with a slight sign of the cross, and the good Ursus at once commenced to praise him, glad that the young mistress listened eagerly and was thankful for his praises.

The procession moved on and hid itself in clouds of golden dust, but the Apostle Peter would have gazed long after it, were it not for Demas, the miller, for whom Ursus worked in the nighttime. He came up to them, and, kissing the Apostle's hand, entreated them to enter his dwelling for refreshment, which was near the Emporium, and saying that they must be hungry and tired, as they had passed the whole day nearly at the gate.

They went with him, and, after rest and refreshments in his house, returned to the Trans-Tiber only toward evening. Intending to cross the river by the Æmilian bridge, they passed through the Clivus Publicus, going over the Aventine, between the temples of Diana and Mercury. From that height the Apostle Peter looked at the edifices about him, on those vanishing in the distance, and, sunk in silence, he meditated on the immensity and dominion of

that city to which he had come to announce the word of God. He also thought about the procession, on all the magnificence he had seen, and wondered in his simple heart that God could give such almightiness to Satan, that He could yield the earth to him to knead, overturn and trample it, to squeeze blood and tears from it, to twist it like a whirlwind, to storm it like a tempest, to consume it like a flame. And his apostle-heart was alarmed by those thoughts, and in spirit he said to the Master :

"O Lord, what shall I do in this city, to which thou hast sent me? To it belong seas and land, the beasts of the field and the creatures of the water; to it belong other cities and kingdoms, and thirty legions which guard them; but I, Lord, am a plain fisherman from the lake. What shall I do? and how shall I conquer its malice?"

Thus speaking he raised his grey, trembling hands toward heaven, praying and exclaiming from the depth of his heart to his Divine Master, himself full of sadness and fear.

But Lygia's voice interrupted his conversation :

"The whole city is on fire," she said.

And the Apostle, after looking at the rising flames, shaded his eyes with his hands and said :

"The wrath of God is on that city!"

CHAPTER XV.

VINICIUS TO LYGIA :

"THE slave Phlegon, by whom I send this letter, is a Christian, and hence, will be one of those who will receive his freedom from thy hands, my dearest. He is an old servant of our house, and I can trust him to deliver this letter. I write from Laurentum, where we have stopped because of the intense heat. This beautiful village once belonged to Otho, and he has since presented it to Poppæa; and although she was divorced from her husband, she saw fit to keep the beautiful gift. When I think of the women that are surrounding me here, and of thee, then it appears to me that from the stones thrown by Deucalion and his wife, various and contradictory kinds of people have formed, and that thou belongest to those that have formed out of crystal. Cæsar is the guest of Poppæa, who had quietly prepared for him a magnificent reception. Among the few

Augustians invited, are Petronius and myself. After the midday feast we went to sea on gilded boats. The water was as calm and as blue as thy eyes. We rowed ourselves, and it probably flattered the Augusta to have consuls and their sons, rowing for her. Cæsar, in purple toga, stood at the helm, and sang a hymn in honor of the sea. But I was thinking of and yearning for thee. I have a villa in Sicily, where the almond forest reaches to the edges of the sea. How I wish that we could leave Rome, and live far away, on the banks of the sea! There I would love thee and profess the faith which Peter will teach me, and which, I already know, does not antagonize love and happiness. One way and another Petronius prevented any reference to thee, knowing that a slight made by the Augusta, would stir me to anger. Thou knowest what happened to me on the pond of Agrippa. Petronius abjured me not to disturb the vanity of that wicked woman. But he does not know that for me there is no love, no beauty apart from thee. Thou hast so transformed my soul that I could not return to the old life. I must tell thee that I am in no danger here, for before my departure Peter told me that I should not encounter any; and I believe him. Some voice in my soul tells me that everything he said would come true; and since he blessed our love, neither Cæsar, nor all the powers of Hades, nor predestination itself could take thee from me. O Lygia! Do not be offended at what I say of predestination, for baptism has not cleansed my heart,—which is still an empty vessel, and which Paul of Tarsus must fill with the sweet teaching, which is the sweeter to me because it is thy teaching. In Antium I shall day and night listen to Paul, who has already acquired such influence over my people that they constantly surround him, and consider him not only a thaumaturgus, but almost a supernatural being. Seeing how glad he was, I asked him what he was doing, and he answered, ‘I am sowing.’ Petronius, who knows that he is among my people, wants to meet him, as does Seneca, who had heard a great deal about him from Gallo. But, Lygia, the stars are growing pale, and the morning Lucifer is growing brighter. A greeting to thee and to the dawn of day, sponsa mea!”

CHAPTER XVI.

VINICIUS TO LYGIA :

"HAST thou ever been in Antium, dearest, with Aulus? If not, I shall be happy to show it to thee. The villas that dot the shore from Laurentum to this place, the palaces and porticos in Antium, reflecting in the sea, my own shelter on the very edge of it, the cypresses and olive trees that frame the place, are beyond description. Oh Lygia, how good it is to live and love! Immediately after our arrival I talked with Paul; we spoke of thee, and afterward he taught me. If I had Petronius's power of writing, I could not describe to thee all that passed through my mind. I did not expect to find in the world such happiness, beauty and peace. Tell me how can the world contain at the same time such people as Peter, Paul of Tarsus, and Cæsar? I ask this because I passed the evening after the teaching of Paul at Nero's, and there Cæsar first read his poem on the destruction of Troy, and lamented that he never saw a burning city. He envied Priam only because the latter saw the conflagration and ruin of his native city. Whereupon Tigellinus said: 'Give the word, divine one, and I will take a torch, and before the night is over, thou wilt see blazing Antium.' But Cæsar called him a fool. 'Whither should I go,' he answered, 'to breathe the sea air and preserve the voice which the gods have gifted me with, and of which, they say, I should take care for the benefit of mankind? Is it not Rome that hinders me; is it not the fetid exhalations of the Subura and the Esquiline that make me hoarse; would not burning Rome make a grander and more tragic spectacle than Antium?' Everybody acquiesced in the sentiment. Cæsar declared that his poem on that occasion would transcend the songs of Homer; and that he would rebuild the city, and that future ages would admire his achievement as the greatest of all ages. Then the drunken guests began to urge him with, 'Do it! Do it!' And he said: 'For that purpose I need more faithful and more devoted men.' I confess that I became anxious, because thou livest in Rome, carissima. But now

I laugh at my anxiety, for Cæsar and the Augustians, though mad, have not the rashness for such an insane act. Still it is but natural for me to be anxious about thy safety; hence I should prefer that the house of Linus were not in that quarter where foreigners reside, and to which naturally less attention would be paid. Thou must be suffering for the want of those conveniences which surrounded thee in childhood. Go to the house of Aulus, Lygia. Cæsar will stay here for a long time, and it is quite safe for thee to go there. Take Linus and Ursus with thee. I live in the hope that before the Palatine will see Cæsar; thou, my divine one, shalt be dwelling in thy own house on the Carinæ. Blessed be the day, the hour, the minute, when thou shalt cross my threshold; and if Christ, whom I am learning to know, shall grant this, then blessed be His name also. I shall serve Him, and give my life for Him. I put it wrongly,—we shall both serve Him until the threads of life give out. I love thee, and greet thee with my whole soul."

CHAPTER XVII.

URSUS was drawing water from a cistern and singing one of his native songs in a low voice, whilst watching Lygia and Vinicius with beaming eyes. They stood among the cypresses in the garden of Linus looking like two white statues. Not the slightest breeze stirred their clothing, but a soft twilight fell over all as they talked in the calm of the evening, holding each other's hand.

"May not some harm happen to thee, Marcus, since thou hast come from Antium without the knowledge of Cæsar?" asked Lygia.

"No, my dear," replied Vinicius. "Cæsar has made known his intention of retiring for two days with Terpnos to compose new songs. Sometimes he acts like this, and for the time thinks of naught else. Besides, what care I for Cæsar when I am with thee? I have longed so much to see thee that whole nights I could not sleep. At times, when I dozed, a feeling of danger threatening thee, woke me with a start. Sometimes I dreamed that the horses I had left on the road to carry me between Antium and Rome, had been stolen; horses that perform the journey more

quickly than Cæsar's couriers. Besides, I love thee so much I could not live any longer without seeing thee."

"I knew thou wert coming. I sent Ursus twice to the Carinæ to inquire for thee. Linus and he both laughed at me."

Clearly, she had thought so, for she had attired herself in a soft white stola instead of the dark dress she usually wore. Her beautiful arms and head rising from its folds looked like primroses bursting through the snow. Entwined among her hair were a few anemones of a crimson hue.

Vinicius took her hands and kissed them; then they sat near each other on the stone seat among the vines. They were not conversing now, but watching the last gleams of the twilight, whose brightness was reflected in their eyes.

They were completely overcome by the peaceful beauty of the evening.

"How calm it is here, and how beautiful everything is," whispered Vinicius. "I never felt so happy before. What is this, Lygia? I never thought such love was possible. I thought it nothing more than a fire in the veins, and desire; now I know for the first time that one can love with all one's strength, and yet feel that sweet calm that puts the soul to rest. It is a feeling new to me. I look on the trees, and seem to share their calmness. I understand now that an hitherto unknown happiness may exist, and I begin to comprehend the peace thou and Pomponia possess. Christ gives it."

She leaned her beautiful head on his shoulder, and said:

"My dear Marcus"—But emotion choked her utterance, and filled her eyes with tears. Vinicius drew her to him, and embracing her, said:

"Lygia! I bless the time I first heard His name."

"I love thee, Marcus," she whispered, softly.

The silence which followed told more forcibly than words could of the depths of feelings stirred within them. The last glimmerings of twilight had faded from the cypresses, and the garden was growing silvery under the young moon. Presently Vinicius spoke.

"I know it. No sooner had I seen thee, and kissed thy dear hands, than I read the questioning in thy eyes. Thou wouldst know if I accepted the teaching of Paul, and if I have received baptism. Wouldst know the reason I am not yet baptised, my flower? It was Paul's wish that

Peter, who first blessed us, should wash me in that cleansing fountain from all my sin. And I, dearest, wish to have thee at my baptism, and would have Pomponia as my god-mother. This is the reason I have not yet been baptised, although I believe in Christ and His teaching. How could I withstand Paul's convincing proofs that Christ came upon earth, that He is God and that He rose from the dead. Many have assured us that they saw Him; people whose lips have never been stained by a lie. When first I listened to Peter in Ostrianum, I even then felt that this man, who asserted that he 'saw' was the one man in all the world incapable of a lie. But I was afraid of thy religion, for I saw in it no wisdom nor beauty; I thought it would take from, not give happiness. But now I know differently, and think how foolish are those who prefer untruth to truth, hatred to love, vice to virtue. Thy religion teaches all the virtues. Many seek justice, but this is the only one that teaches men's hearts to be just, teaches them to be pure and faithful, as are thine and Pomponia's. My eyes would be blinded indeed could I not see this much. And besides all this, are we not promised life everlasting, and boundless happiness. What more is left to desire? It is a religion that upholds truth and destroys death; who would not love and embrace such? Paul has shown to me that instead of destroying happiness, as I had believed, it increases it manifold. I can hardly understand it, but I feel its truth. I was never so happy before, and could not be so happy if I had forcibly taken thee, for then I could not have heard from thy lips the 'I love thee' thou spakest a moment ago. O Lygia! Both the heart and the reason proclaim this religion the best and what can we oppose against them?"

Lygia drank in his words, as she gazed on him with eyes, which in the moonlight seemed like azure flowers glittering with dew.

"Yes, Marcus, that is so!" said she, drawing more closely to him.

And in that moment their happiness was intensified by the knowledge that not only love, but an even greater power united them; a sweet unconquerable power which renders love enduring to all eternity. Their hearts were full of a sweet repose born of the certain knowledge that throughout all changes they would love and belong to each other. Vinicius felt, too, that this was a love not only

pure and deep, but such as he had never known, such as the world could not give. It embraced all things, Lygia, Christ's teaching, the moonlight on the cypresses, the stillness of the night,—the whole universe.

Presently he whispered in a voice broken by emotion :

"Thou wilt be to me the very soul of my soul, and the dearest thing in God's creation. Our hearts will throb with the same pulsation, we shall breathe the same prayers, unite in the same praise. Oh my dear! Could fancy picture anything sweeter than this; to live together in the love of God, and to know that after death we shall awake again as from a pleasant sleep, to a new life. I wonder I did not see it thus before. It seems clear to me now, that no one can stand against this religion. A few centuries hence, all people will embrace it. Jupiter will be forgotten, there will be no God and no temples but Christ and His temples. I listened whilst Paul conversed with Petronius; and how, thinkst thou Petronius answered at the close? 'That is not for me;' and could say naught else."

"Repeat to me Paul's words," said Lygia.

"During one evening at my house Petronius began to speak lightly and jestingly as he often does, when Paul said to him: 'Canst thou deny that Christ existed, O Petronius, and that He rose again from the dead. Thou wast not living then, but He was seen by Peter and John, I also saw Him on the road to Damascus. Prove that we are liars, and then thou canst deny what we teach.' Petronius said he could not deny, for many things were done which none could understand, the truth of which were vouched for by people whose word could not be doubted. 'But to discover a new God, and to embrace his doctrine, are two different things,' said he. 'I do not wish to know, that which may spoil life. It matters little, whether or not our gods are true gods; they are beautiful; they rule us pleasantly and give us no responsibility.' Paul replied, 'And wilt thou refuse a religion which teaches love, justice, and mercy, because it brings the cares of life? but is thy life now without care? Behold, the most wealthy and powerful among you knows not when he retires to sleep whether he will not awake to a sentence of death. If this religion of justice and mercy were accepted by Cæsar, would not life be happier and more pleasant? and as to beauty, if these gods who are vile, adulterous, and vengeful have such beautiful temples and statues dedicated to them, how much

more beautiful would be your offerings to one merciful God of Truth! Thou art rich, and canst live in ease, and so thou dost find praise for these things; but if instead of riches, thou, although the offspring of a noble house wert poor and despised, would it not be better for thee, then, if all were Christians? In Rome are many alumni; (children of sometimes even wealthy parents, who rather than have the trouble of rearing them, cast them off) thou mightst have been one of these. Such a thing does not happen where parents are-Christians. If, on arriving to man's estate, thou hadst married a woman whom thou didst love, thou wouldst wish her to be true to thee until death. But see what vileness, what shamelessness happen among you; it is a matter of surprise when a woman whom ye call "univira" (of one husband) appears. But women who serve Christ are faithful to their husbands, as husbands who follow Him are true to their wives. Ye cannot trust those nearest to ye; the world fears ye, and ye fear your own slaves, for ye know that at any time, a rebellion against your tyranny may arise—such has happened before this. Thou art rich and young! and art thou sure that to-morrow may not come the order to die? How knowest thou, that to-morrow thy thousands of slaves may not cause thy blood to flow? Canst thou, then, be happy and free from care? I offer thee a religion of love, which commands masters to rule with love, servants to serve with love; which teaches universal justice and mercy, and promises endless happiness. How canst thou then, Petronius, say that Christ's religion mars life, when thou thyself wouldst be infinitely happier and safer were it spread all over the world?

"To this Petronius only said, 'That is not for me.' He then rose to depart, and in going out, said, 'I prefer my Eunice, O little Jew! but I should not like to oppose thee on the platform.' I had listened with all my soul, to the words of Paul, and at his reference to our women, I glorified that teaching which has raised thee as pure as a lily in springtime. I called to mind Poppæa, who has been divorced twice, Calvia Crispinilla and many others, and almost all, save Pomponia are vile. But she and thou wilt be true even though all else should desert me. Wert thou conscious, when I was in Antium, of how I conversed with thee, as though thou wert near me? I love thee better, a hundred times, that thou didst flee from me. I care not now

for Cæsar's palace, its music and splendor, I only want thee. Give thy consent and we will leave Rome entirely."

Lygia thought awhile, her head still resting on his shoulder, then answered:

"Very well, Marcus. Thou didst write of Sicily. Aulus desires to go there in his old age."

Vinicius interrupted her joyfully.

"True, my dear! Our estates join. The climate is more delightful on that beautiful coast and the nights are lovelier far than in Rome. There life and happiness seem to be synonymous."

And now he dreamed sweetly of the future.

"We shall forget our cares there. We will wander among the olive groves, and rest beneath their shade. O Lygia! What a blissful life! to love and serve each other; to gaze on the sea and sky together; and together worship a merciful God; to live peacefully in justice and truth."

He drew her closer to him, as both thought silently of the future. The signet ring of knighthood on his finger glittered in the moon's rays. Where the poorer workers dwelt, all were sleeping, and the silence remained unbroken.

"Wilt thou give me leave to see Pomponia?" said Lygia.

"Yes, dear one! We will ask them to visit us, or we will go ourselves to visit them. If thou wouldst like it, we will take the Apostle Peter. He is old now, and bent with toil. Paul will come to see us also—he will mayhap convert Aulus Plautius, and we will establish a Christian colony."

Lygia raised his hand to press it to her lips, but he whispered:

"No, Lygia, no! It is I, who should honor thee; give me thy hands."

"I love thee."

He kissed her white fingers, and for a time they sat motionless. All around, silence and stillness reigned supreme.

Suddenly, a deep sound as of thunder seemed to rise from the ground. Lygia shivered through all her frame. Vinicius rose, saying:

"The lions are roaring in the vivarium."

They both listened. That roar was answered by a second, and third, and many more from all parts of the city. In Rome sometimes thousands of lions were kept in the different arenas, and often in the night they crept to the grat-

ing and voiced thus their longing for freedom and their native desert. Now, they answered each other through the stillness, until the whole city resounded with their roars. There was such an indescribable terror and weirdness in these sounds, that Lygia listened with a strange fear and foreboding at her heart.

But Vinicius placed his arm round her and said :

“Fear not, dear one. The games are near, and the *vi-
aria* are crowded.”

They entered the house of Linus, while the roaring of the lions grew louder and louder.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN the meantime Petronius was gaining new victories in Antium over the Augustinians, who were vying with him for the favor of Cæsar. The influence of Tigellinus was on the wane. In Rome, where it was necessary to remove dangerous people, rob them of their property, arrange political matters, give shows astounding by their luxury and bad taste, and especially to satisfy the whimsical appetite of Cæsar, Tigellinus, handy and adroit, was an indispensable man. But in Antium, amid the palaces reflecting in the sea, Cæsar lived the life of a Greek. From morn till night he read verses, discussed their structure and elegance, delighted in apt turns of expression, occupied himself with music, the theatre,—in a word, with that which Greek genius invented, and which beautified the world. Under such circumstances, Petronius, who was more refined than Tigellinus and other Augustians; who was witty, eloquent, rich in fine conceptions and taste, overshadowed, of course, all others. Cæsar sought his society, gave thought to his opinion, asked his advice when he composed something, and showed him more favors than ever. It seemed to the courtiers that Petronius's victory was complete; that the friendship between him and Cæsar was stronger than ever and promised to last many years. Even those who had theretofore shown dislike for the brilliant epicurean, were dancing attendance upon him, and seeking his favors. Some were sincerely glad that a man came to power who knew the exact value of people; who looked with skeptical smile on the servility displayed toward him by his enemies

of yesterday, and who, either from laziness or nobility of character, was not revengeful, and did not take advantage of his power to ruin anybody. There were moments when Petronius could ruin Tigellinus, but he preferred to ridicule him and expose his want of refinement, and his insipidity. In Rome the Senate took breath, for not a single death sentence had been issued during six weeks. In Antium and in Rome people were telling of the wonderful and exquisite profligacy of Cæsar and his favorites, but every one preferred to live under the rule of a refined Cæsar, to living under one brutalized by the influence of Tigellinus. Tigellinus lost his head, and saw no way but to acknowledge Petronius as conqueror, for Cæsar repeatedly announced, that in Rome and in his court there were but two souls capable of understanding each other; there were only two Greeks—himself and Petronius.

Everybody was convinced that the tactfulness of Petronius would prolong his influence beyond that of any other man. Cæsar, it was thought, could not dispense with him,—with whom could he discuss poetry, converse about music, the hippodrome; to whom could he look for assurance that his production was really eloquent? And Petronius with his peculiar indifference seemed to consider his position as of no significance. As usual he was negligent, slothful, witty, and skeptical. He often appeared to be making sport of himself and of others, of Cæsar, and of the entire world. Sometimes he dared to pass adverse judgment on Cæsar in his presence, and went to such lengths that people thought that he would surely work his own ruin. But Petronius gave such coloring to his strictures that he always emerged with triumph. Some days after the return of Vinicius from Rome, Cæsar read to a small circle an extract from one of his *Troyads*, and when he had finished, and the hand-clapping subsided, he looked inquiringly at Petronius. And the latter said:

“Bad verses; they ought to be thrown into the fire.”

Every heart stopped beating from terror,—Nero had never heard such a sentence from any man,—only the face of Tigellinus was radiant with delight. But Vinicius turned pale; he thought that Petronius, who was never drunk before, was this time undoubtedly in his cups.

Nero's wounded vanity trembled in his voice as he asked sweetly:

“What defects dost thou find in them?”

Petronius attacked him :

"Do not believe them," he said, pointing at the surrounding people. "They do not understand anything. What defects are there in thy verses? If thou wilt have the truth, I will tell thee: thy verses are worthy of Virgil, of Ovid, even of Homer, but are not worthy of thee. Thou must not write such verses. The conflagration which thou hast described does not blaze enough, the fire does not burn enough. Listen not to the flatteries of Lucan. Had he written such verses, I should account him a genius; thy case is different. And knowst thou why? Thou art greater than they. We demand more from him who is gifted of the gods as thou art. But thou art slothful. Thou preferest sleep after dinner to work. Thou couldst create a work that would surpass anything written in the world; and therefore I tell thee to thy face: write better verses!"

He spoke carelessly, half-joking, half-chiding, and Cæsar's eyes were misty from delight.

"The gods have given me a little talent, but they have given me something greater,—a friend, a true judge who can tell the truth to my face." He stretched his fat hand, covered with red hair to a golden chandelier, plundered from the Delphi, intending to burn the verses, but Petronius tore them from his hand before they reached the flame.

"No, no!" said he; "even such bad verses belong to mankind. Leave them to humanity."

"Permit me, then, to send them to thee in a chest of my own invention," said Nero, embracing Petronius.

After a little while he added:

"Yes, thou art right. My conflagration of Troy does not burn enough. But I thought that it would be sufficient for me to equal Homer. A certain timidity and a strict estimate of myself have always hampered me. But thou hast opened my eyes. When a sculptor wishes to chisel a statue of a god, he must find a model; but I have none. I never have seen a burning city, wherefore my description lacks veracity."

"And I tell thee that one must be a great artist to understand this."

Nero mused for a while, then asked:

"Answer one question, Petronius: dost thou regret the burning of Troy?"

"Do I regret? By the lame consort of Venus, not in

the least! And I will tell thee why. Troy would not have been burned, if Prometheus had not given fire to men, and if the Greeks had not declared war against Priam. And had there been no fire, Æschylus would not have written his Prometheus, just as without war Homer would not have written his Iliad. For one, I would rather have Prometheus and the Iliad, than a small city, probably shabby and dirty and enlivened by the squabbles of some insignificant procurator with the local areopagus."

"I call these wise words," said Nero. "For poetry and art one can and must sacrifice everything. Happy were the Achæans who furnished Homer with a theme for the Iliad; happy was Priam who saw the ruin of his birthplace. But I,—I have never seen a burning city."

The silence that followed was interrupted by Tigellinus.

"I have told thee already, Cæsar," he said, "that give but the command, and Antium shall be burned. Or, if thou wishest to spare the palaces and villas, I will order the burning of the ships in Ostia, or I will build a wooden city on the Hills of Alban, and thou wilt apply the torch. Which dost thou choose?"

Nero glanced at him with contempt.

"Wouldst thou have me gaze on the burning of wooden sheds? Thy mind is now a barren waste, Tigellinus. And I see that thou hast a low estimate of my talent and my Troyad, if thou thinkest that any sacrifice would be too great for them."

Tigellinus was confused, and Nero, as if desiring to change the subject, added:

"Summer is passing. Oh, what a stench there must be in Rome now! However, we must return for the summer games."

"Cæsar," said Tigellinus, "when thou dismissest the Augustians, permit me to remain a moment with thee."

An hour later, Vinicius, returning from Cæsar's villa, said to Petronius:

"There was a moment when I thought that thou hadst ruined thyself completely. Remember that thou art playing with death."

"That is my arena," he answered carelessly; "and the consciousness of being a powerful gladiator amuses me. See how all has ended. My influence has grown even more. He will send me the verses in a chest which, I will wager, will be both priceless and tasteless. I shall order my

physician to keep physics in it. I did it also that Tigellinus, seeing my success, might attempt to imitate me. I imagine his display of wit would be as ridiculous as the attempt of a bear of the Pyrenees to walk a tight-rope. I shall laugh like Democritus. I could, if I wished, ruin Tigellinus, and take his place as pretorian prefect. It is out of sheer indolence that I prefer the life I am leading, and even Cæsar's verses."

"But what dexterity to turn censure into praise! Are those verses really as bad? I am no judge of poetry."

"Not worse than others. Lucan has more talent in one of his fingers, but Bronzebeard is not entirely devoid of it. He has an uncommon passion for poetry and music. In two days we will hear the music set by him to the hymn in honor of Aphrodite, which he will finish to-day or to-morrow. There will be a small circle,—only I, thou, Tullius Senecio and the young Nerva. I told thee once that his verses serve me the same purpose after a feast that flamingo feathers serve Vitellius, but it is not true. They are sometimes eloquent. Hecuba's words are touching. She complains of the pains of childbirth, and Nero found very happy expressions for them, probably because he experienced great torment in giving birth to every verse. I often pity him. By Pollux, what a wonderful mixture! Caligula was damaged in his cranium, but he never did such strange things."

"Who can foresee to what end the insanity of Ahenobarbus will lead?" asked Vinicius.

"No man. Such things may happen that for centuries men's hair will stand on end at the thought of them. And it is that precisely which interests me. I am as bored as Jupiter Ammon in the desert, but under another Cæsar I might be bored even more. Thy Jew, Paul, is eloquent,—that I accord to him; and if people like him continue to proclaim the Christian religion, our gods are in serious danger of being shelved. True, we would be less endangered were Nero a Christian, but thy prophet from Tarsus, applying his proofs to me did not consider that this uncertainty is the charm of life. Who does not play at dice, does not lose; yet people play at dice. There is a certain delight and forgetfulness in it. I have known sons of knights and senators who voluntarily became gladiators. Thou sayest that life is a game to me,—true; but it is because it diverts me, while Christian virtues would bore me

as do the discourses of Seneca. That is the reason Paul's eloquence was wasted on me. He ought to understand that people like me will never accept his religion. With thee the case is different; thou couldst avoid Christianity as thou wouldst a pestilence, or couldst as easily embrace it. I acknowledge the validity of his reasoning, and yawn while listening to them. We are acting like madmen, we are drifting toward an abyss; something is giving away under us, something is dying around us,—agreed! We will not be able to avoid death, but we do not wish to burden life, and wait upon death before it is upon us. Life exists for its own sake, not for death."

"But I pity thee, Petronius."

"Do not pity me more than I pity myself. Formerly thou wert glad to be among us; when fighting in Armenia, thou wert longing for Rome."

"I am longing for Rome now."

"Yes, for thou art in love with a Christian vestal, who lives beyond the Tiber. But it does not surprise me; I am surprised that though your teaching contains, according to thee, a sea of happiness, though thy love will soon be crowned by marriage, sadness is still on thy face. Poppœa Græcina is always sad; since thou hast become a Christian, thou hast also ceased smiling; yet thou art trying to persuade me that it is a cheerful religion. If all Christians love this way, by the bright curls of Bacchus I shall not follow in your footsteps."

"That is another thing," answered Vinicius. "I swear, not by the curls of Bacchus, but by the soul of my father, that I could never before imagine the happiness with which I am breathing now. But I am wearied, and, strange as it may seem, when I am away from Lygia, I imagine that some danger is threatening her. I know not what danger, nor whence it may come, but I feel it, as one feels a coming storm."

"In two days I shall obtain for thee permission to leave Antium for any period of time thou wishest. Poppœa has also quieted down, and, so far as I know, no danger from her threatens thee or Lygia."

"Even to-day she asked for what purpose I went to Rome, although I departed secretly."

"May be she had thee watched. However, she, too, has now to reckon with me."

"Paul told me," said Vinicius, "that God sometimes

warns us, but commanded me not to believe in presentiments. I am struggling against but cannot overcome it. To relieve my feelings, I will tell thee what happened. On a night similar to this I and Lygia were sitting and planning our future. I cannot tell thee how happy we were. Suddenly the lions began to roar. It is a common thing in Rome, but since then I have no rest. The roar sounded to my ears like a threat, like a warning of some evil. Thou knowest that I am not easily alarmed, but the alarm I felt made everything darker to me than the night. It came in such a strange and unexpected manner, that the sound is even now ringing in my ears, and my heart is fluttering with fear, as if Lygia were implored me to protect her from something terrible,—aye even from those very lions. And I am suffering untold pangs. Think of some pretext for my departure, or I will go without permission. I cannot remain here,—I tell thee I cannot remain!"

"It has not come to feeding consuls and sons of consuls to lions," said Petronius, laughing. "Ye may meet death in some other form, but not in that. Besides, who knows that they were lions,—German mufflons' roar is as gentle as that of lions. As for me, I ridicule both fate and presentiments. It was dark last night, and I saw stars falling like rain. Some people have an evil foreboding at such a sight, but I thought that if my star be among the falling ones, I shall not lack company." Then he thought for a moment and said:

"If your Christ has risen from the dead, He may protect you both from death."

"He may," answered Vinicius, raising his eyes to the starry heavens.

CHAPTER XIX.

NERO played and sang in honor of the "Lady of Cyprus" the verses and music of which he composed himself. On that day he was in voice and felt that his music really impressed those present. The consciousness of it added so much strength to his voice, and roused his own soul so much that he seemed inspired. At the end he grew pale from genuine emotion. And for the first time in his life he

did not care for the praise of others. A moment he sat with bowed head, holding the cithara in his hands; then he rose and said:

"I am tired and need air. Tune the cithara meanwhile."

He wrapped his throat in a silk kerchief and, turning to Petronius and Vinicius, who were sitting in a corner of the hall, said:

"Come with me. Thou, Vinicius, give me thy hand; I feel weak; and Petronius will speak to me of music."

They went out on the terrace overlooking a court which was paved with alabaster and sprinkled with saffron.

"Here it is easier to breathe," said Nero. "My soul is moved and sad though I see that I might sing in public what I have sung to thee on trial, and my triumph will be such as no Roman has ever achieved."

"Thou mayest appear here in Rome, and in Achæa. I admire thee with all my heart and mind, divinity,"—replied Petronius.

"I believe thee. Thou art too slothful to force thyself to flattery, and as sincere as Tullius Senecio, but thou dost understand more than he. Tell me, what dost thou think about music?"

"When I hear poetry, when I look on a quadriga directed by thee in the circus, or on beautiful statues, on a temple or a picture, I feel that I fully comprehend what I see, and that my enthusiasm absorbs all that which these objects can give. And when I hear music, especially thine, newer beauties and delights open to me every moment. I pursue them, I seize them, but ere I have time to make them my own newer and newer ones flow in, just like waves of the sea which surge incessantly. Music is also a sea. We stand on one shore and look into the distance, but the other shore we can't see."

"Ah, what deep knowledge thou hast!" said Nero.

For a moment they walked in silence, and only the saffron under their feet made a slight noise.

At last Nero said:

"Thou hast expressed my idea, and I repeat now what I had often said, that in all Rome thou art the only one capable of understanding me. Yes, my opinion of music is the same as thine. When I play and sing I see such things which I did not see existing in my dominions or in the whole world. I am Cæsar, a world is mine, I am almighty, and nevertheless music opens to me new things."

doms, new seas and mountains, new delights unknown before. Frequently I cannot name them, nor comprehend them, but I feel them. I feel the gods, I see Olympus. Some kind of a breeze unearthly blows in upon me,—I discern, as through a mist, certain immeasurable greatnesses, but calm and bright, as sunrise. All the world brightens around me in light, effulgent, and I tell thee" (here Nero's voice quivered with genuine wonder) "that I, Cæsar and god, feel myself at such times as little as a grain of dust. Canst thou believe this?"

"Yes; only great artists have the power to feel their littleness in the presence of art."

"This is a night of sincerity, and I open my whole soul to thee as to a friend, and I will tell thee even more: Dost thou think I do not know that in Rome people write insults against me on the walls, call me matricide, and wife-murderer; hold me a monster and a tyrant, because Tigellinus has wrested from me a few sentences of death against my enemies? Yes, my dear, they hold me a monster and I know it. They have ascribed to me so many cruelties that I often ask myself: 'Am I not cruel?' But they do not understand that a man's acts may be cruel, and he himself may be not cruel at all. Ah, no one believes, and perhaps not even thou my dear, that at moments when music caresses my soul I feel as kind as a child in the cradle. I swear by those stars which shine above us, that I speak the plain truth to thee. People do not know how much goodness is concealed in this heart, and what treasures I find in it when music opens the doors to them."

Petronius, who had not doubted even for a moment that Nero was speaking sincerely at that moment, and that music might bring out the very noblest qualities of his soul, which was encumbered by mountains of egotism, profligacy and crime, said:

"Men should know thee as nearly as I do. Rome has never been able to appreciate thee."

And Cæsar leaned more heavily on Vinicius's arm, as if he were bending under the weight of injustice, and said:

"Tigellinus has told me that in the Senate they whisper into one another's ears that Diodorus and Terpnos play on the cithara better than I. They refuse me even that! But thou, who art always truthful, tell me sincerely: do they play better, or as well?"

"By no means. Thy touch is finer and has more power.

In thee the artis is evident, in them the expert. Decidedly! When one hears their music first, then only he understands thee well."

"If it is so, let them live. Thou canst not imagine how great a service thou hast rendered them in this moment. If I had condemned them, I would have to take others in place of them."

"And people would say, besides, that out of love for music thou destroyest music in thy dominions. Never kill art for art's sake, O divinity."

"How different thou art from Tigellinus!" replied Nero. "But seest thou, I am, properly speaking, an artist in everything, and as music opened to me new worlds, the existence of which I have not divined, worlds which I do not possess, delight and happiness I do not know, I cannot live a common life. Music tells me that the uncommon exists, hence I seek it with all the power of dominion which the gods have placed in my hands. It seems to me that to reach those Olympian-heights I must do something which no man has done hitherto,—I must transcend the stature of man in good or evil. I also know that people say I am losing my mind. But I am not going mad, I am only seeking! and if I am going mad, it is out of disgust and impatience that I cannot find. I am seeking—dost understand? I want to be greater than man, and only as artist I can be greater than man."

He lowered his voice that Vinicius might not hear him and, putting his lips to the ear of Petronius, whispered:

"Dost know that I condemned my mother and wife to death, mainly for this reason? At the gate of the unknown world I wished to lay the greatest sacrifice that man could put there. I thought that afterward something would happen, that doors would be opened beyond which I should see what has never been seen. Let it be something wonderful and awful to human conception, if only uncommon and great. But these sacrifices were not enough. To open the Olympian doors some greater sacrifice is needed, and let it be given as the fates desire."

"What dost thou intend to do?"

"Thou shalt see, thou shalt see sooner than thou thinkest. Meanwhile know that there are two Neros,—one such as people know, the other an artist—whom thou alone knowest, and if he slays as does death, or is in frenzy like Bacchus, it is only because the flatness and wretchedness of

common life stifle him, and I would like to destroy them, though I had to resort to fire and iron! Oh, how poor this world shall be when I shall be gone from it! No one has suspected yet, not even thou, my dear, how great an artist I am. But precisely because of this I suffer, and I tell thee sincerely that at times my soul is as gloomy as those cypresses which stand darkling there in front of us. It is hard for a man to bear at once the weight of supreme power and the highest talents."

"I sympathize with thee, Cæsar, with all my heart, and with me earth and sea, not including Vinicius, who deifies thee in his soul."

"He has ever been dear to me," said Nero, "though he serves Mars, not the Muses."

"He serves Aphrodite first of all," answered Petronius.

And he at once decided to settle the affair of his nephew at a blow, and at the same time to eliminate every danger which might threaten him.

"He is in love, as was Troilus with Cressida," said he. "Permit him, lord, to go to Rome, else he will wither. Dost thou know that that Lygian hostage whom thou gavest him has been found, and that Vinicius, when leaving for Antium, left her in charge of a certain Linus? I have not told thee about this for thou wert composing thy hymn which was more important than all. Vinicius wished to make her his mistress, but when she turned out to be as virtuous as Lucretia, he fell in love with her virtue, and now he wishes to marry her. She is a king's daughter, hence it shall not be unbecoming for him; but he is a real soldier; he sighs, and withers, and groans, but he is waiting for the permission of his Emperor."

"The Emperor does not choose wives for his soldiers."

"I told thee, lord, that he deifies thee."

"All the more may he be certain of permission. She is a handsome girl, but a little too narrow in the hips. The Augusta Poppæa complained to me that she enchanted our child in the gardens of the Palatine."

"But I told Tigellinus that a god is not subject to evil charms. Thou rememberest, divinity, how he became confused, and how thou didst exclaim: 'Habet!'"

"I remember," and he turned to Vinicius.

"Dost thou love her, as Petronius says?"

"I love her, lord," replied Vinicius.

"Then I command thee to go to Rome to-morrow, and

marry her,—and do not appear again before my eyes without the marriage ring.”

“I thank thee, lord, with all my heart and soul.”

“Oh, how pleasant it is to make people happy!” exclaimed Cæsar. “I should like to do nothing else in all my life.”

“Grant us one favor more, O divinity,” said Petronius, “make thy will known before the Augusta. Vinicius would never dare to wed a woman without the consent of the Augusta. But thou, O lord, wilt dissipate her prejudice with a word, by declaring that thou hast commanded this union.”

“Well,” said Cæsar, “I could refuse nothing to thee or Vinicius.”

He turned toward the villa, and they followed with hearts full of gladness because of the favors granted to them.

Vinicius had to restrain himself not to fall on the neck of Petronius, for now it seemed to him that all dangers and obstacles were removed.

In the atrium of the villa young Nerva and Tullius Senecio were entertaining the Augusta with conversation; Terpnos and Diodorus were tuning citharæ.

Having entered, Nero sat in an armchair inlaid with tortoise shells, whispered something in the ear of a Greek boy, and waited.

The boy soon returned with a golden casket. Nero opened it, and taking out a necklace of great opals, said:

“These are gems worthy of this evening.”

“The light of daybreak is playing in them,” said Poppæa, being certain that the necklace was for her.

Cæsar, now raising, now lowering, the rosy stones, said at last:

“Vinicius, thou wilt give this necklace, from me, to the young Lygian princess, whom I command thee to marry.”

Poppæa’s glance, full of anger and amazement, passed from Cæsar to Vinicius and rested at last on Petronius. But the latter, leaning carelessly over the arm of the chair, passed his hand over the back of the harp as if to better fix its form in his mind.

Meanwhile Vinicius, having given thanks for the present, turned to Petronius and said:

“How shall I thank thee for what thou hast this day done for me?”

“Bring a pair of swans to Euterpe,” replied Petronius, “praise Cæsar’s songs and laugh at omens. Henceforth, I

think, that the roaring of lions will disturb neither thy sleep, nor the sleep of thy Lygian lily."

"No," said Vinicius, "now I am perfectly at rest."

"May fortune favor thee! But be attentive, for Cæsar is taking his lute again. Hold thy breath, listen, and shed tears."

In fact Cæsar had taken his lute and raised his eyes. The conversations in the hall had ceased, and people sat as still as if petrified. Only Terpnos and Diodorus, who were to accompany Cæsar, were watchful, looked now at each other, now at Cæsar's lips, waiting for the first sounds of the song.

Just then a movement and noise began in the entrance; and after a while the Emperor's freedman, Phaon, appeared from behind a curtain; and close behind him was the consul Lecanius.

Nero frowned.

"Pardon, divine Emperor," said Phaon, with panting breath, "there is a conflagration in Rome! The greater part of the city is in flames!"

At this news all sprang from their seats, and Nero, putting down the lute, said:

"Oh gods! I shall see a burning city, and finish the Troyad."

And then he turned to the consul:

"If I go soon, shall I have a chance to see the fire?"

"Lord," replied Lecanius, as pale as a sheet, "there is a whole sea of flame over the city; smoke is suffocating the inhabitants; and people faint or cast themselves into the fire from madness. Rome is perishing, lord."

A moment of silence followed, which was broken by the cry of Vinicius:

"*Væ misero mihi!*"

And the young man, casting his toga aside, ran out of the court in his tunic.

And Nero lifted his hands toward heaven, and exclaimed:

"Woe unto thee, sacred city of Priam!"

CHAPTER XX.

VINICIUS had barely time to command a few slaves to follow him; and afterward sprang on his horse, and rushed along in the deep night through the empty streets of

Antium in the direction of Laurentum. The senator, Junius, whom Vinicius first saw at the inn surrounded by a detachment of Batavian slaves was the first to give him a more detailed description of the conflagration. The fire was begun at the Circus Maximus, in the part which touches the Palatine and the Cælian hill, but spread with incomprehensible rapidity, and seized the whole centre of the city. Never since the time of Brennus had such a terrible catastrophe come upon the city. "The whole circus has burned, as well as the shops and houses surrounding it," said Junius; "the Aventine and Cælian hills are on fire. The flames surrounding the Palatine have reached the Carinæ."

Here Junius, who owned on the Carinæ a magnificent "insulæ," filled with works of art which he loved exceedingly well, seized a handful of dust, and, scattering it on his head, began to groan despairingly.

But Vinicius grasped his shoulder :

"My house too is on the Carinæ," he said; "but when everything is perishing, let it perish too."

Then, remembering that at his advice Lygia might have gone to the house of Aulus, he inquired :

"And the Vicus Patricius?"

"On fire," replied Junius.

"The Trans-Tiber?"

Junius looked at him with amazement.

"What do you care for the Trans-Tiber?" he asked, pressing his aching temples with his palms.

"The Trans-Tiber is more important to me than all Rome," cried Vinicius, with vehemence.

"Thou canst come there only through Via Portuensis, as the smoke will stifle thee in the Aventine.—The Trans-Tiber? I know not. The fire could not have reached it, but may be at this moment it has,—the gods alone know!"

Here Junius hesitated a moment and then, lowering his voice, said :

"I know that thou wilt not betray me, so I will tell thee that this is no common fire. It was not permitted to save the circus. I myself have heard. When houses began to burn all around, I myself heard thousands of voices exclaiming: 'Death to those who save!' certain people ran through the streets throwing burning wood into buildings. On the other side people are revolting and crying that the city is burning at command. Woe to the city! Woe to all of us, and to me! No human tongue can tell what is going

on there : people are perishing in the flames, or killing one another in the crowd. The end of Rome has come !” and he again commenced to repeat : “ Woe ! woe to the city and to us !” And Vinicius sprang on his horse, and spurred forward along the Appian Way.

But now it was rather a struggle, for a whole river of people and vehicles came against him from the city. The city, embraced by a monstrous conflagration, lay before Vinicius as on the palm of his hand. From the sea of fire and smoke poured a terrible heat, and the cries of people could not stifle the roar and the hissing of flames.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON approaching the walls, Vinicius saw that he would have less difficulty reaching Rome than in making his way to the middle of the city. The great concourse of people made it difficult to traverse the Appian Way. All places lying on both sides of it were turned into camping grounds. Near the Porta Appia stood the temple of Mars. The crowd had thrown down the doors of this temple to provide themselves with a refuge during the night. Monuments were seized in the cemeteries, and battles which were fought in defense of them often terminated in bloodshed. Yet Ustrinum, with all its disorder, gave but slight indication of what was taking place beneath the walls of the Capitol. All respect for law, family ties, and position, had ceased to exist. Drunken gladiators ran wild through the neighboring squares, shouting, dispersing, trampling, and robbing whom they could. A large number of barbarians, who were exposed for sale, escaped in the confusion. The burning of Rome and its destruction meant to them the end of slavery and the promise of revenge. Inhabitants, who had lost all they owned in the conflagration, appealed in vain to the gods. They were met by these barbarians, who dragged the clothes from their backs, and carried off the young women. They were joined by the most ill-conditioned of those slaves, who had served in the city for years, the veriest wretches of their class, whose existence even in Rome had hardly been known of. Men of many nationalities, Asiatics, Africans, Greeks, Thracians, Germans, Britons, howling in different tongues, raged through the

streets, thinking themselves now free to reward themselves for their long years of suffering and misery. Amidst this wild scene might be observed the glittering helmets of pretorians. The more peaceable and self-respecting of the population sought their protection. Hand-to-hand encounters between them and the maddened multitude were constantly occurring. Vinicius had witnessed the capturing of cities, but never had he seen such chaos, such utter confusion before. Above all roared the devouring flames, as they leaped to the very hilltops of the world's proudest and greatest city. It was impossible to see the sky, so dense and black was the smoke. By a great effort Vinicius at last reached the Appian Gate; where he saw he would not be able to gain the city through the division of the Porta Capena. This was not only because of the immense throng, but on account of the fearful heat within the gate. There was another way by which the city might be gained, that of passing around the Aventine, and through a part of the city that was now enveloped in a sea of flame. But this fact alone made it an impossibility. Vinicius saw that he must retrace his steps toward Ustrinum, turn from the Appian Way, and crossing the river below the city, go to the Via Portuensis, which led direct to the Trans-Tiber. That was difficult to accomplish since he had to return by the Appian Way where the disorder was all the time increasing. He must make a way for himself, even with his sword. But he found he had no weapons. He saw at the fountain of Mercury a centurion whom he knew. At the head of a small body of soldiers he was defending the temple. Vinicius commanded him to follow. The centurion obeyed, and Vinicius, taking command of the detachment himself pressed his way through the throng in such a manner that many who were unable to get out of his path in time fell wounded or killed by the way.

In doing so Vinicius forgot for the time being Paul's teaching about brotherly love. Curses and stones followed him and his men; but he paid no attention to these, his object being to gain open spaces without any delay. His advance, notwithstanding, was slow. Those who were encamped would not move, and many were the curses heaped on Nero and the pretorians. The throng became more threatening. Voices were heard accusing Nero of setting the city on fire. Threats of death were made against him and Poppæa. Cries of "Sanio," "Histrio" (buffoon, actor.)

"Matricide!" could be heard on all sides. "Drag him to the Tiber," shouted some. It only needed a leader for these threats to be carried into effect, and to cause an open rebellion at any moment. The rage of the crowd was now turned against the pretorians, who were unable moreover to extricate themselves from the throng. Besides the way was blocked by all sorts of obstacles placed there, such as barrels of provisions, furniture, infants' cradles, carts, and many other such things. But the weapons of the pretorians finally conquered the defenseless multitude. After much difficulty, and circuitous riding, they at last reached the village of Vicus Alexandri. Here they crossed the Tiber, where they were more in the open, and encountered less smoke. Here he learned that only some of the alleys of the Trans-Tiber were burning, but that everything must yield to the fury of the conflagration, since many were using efforts to spread the fire, and would not permit any attempt at extinguishing it, declaring that they were acting under orders. Vinicius had no doubt in his mind of Cæsar's guilty act, and he justified to himself the popular clamor for vengeance. Rome's most inveterate enemy could not have done worse. Nero's madness was grown too terrible, and the very existence of the people threatened because of his folly. Vinicius could not help believing that Nero's hour had come, and that his own destruction was involved in that of Rome. That might happen in a few hours were there a man found with courage enough to lead the maddened multitude. Thoughts of vengeance and daring floated through the mind of the young tribune. But should he do so? The house of Vinicius was known throughout all Rome. It needed but a name such as his. Rome once reached the verge of a civil war when the slaves of Pedanius Secundus, the prefect, were sentenced to death. What then must happen to-day in the face of a calamity more dreadful than any that Rome had seen in eight centuries? "Whosoever will rouse the Quirites to arms," thought Vinicius, "can most assuredly overcome Nero and wear the purple." Why should not he be the one to do this. He was younger, stronger, more active than the rest of the Augustians. Certainly there were thirty legions on the boundaries of the Empire, at Nero's command. But these thirty legions with their commanders,—would not they be roused to fury at the news of the burning of the city and its temples? In such an event, might not Vini-

cious become Cæsar? The Augustians whispered amongst themselves, that it had been predicted by a soothsayer that Otho should wear the purple. But was not he as powerful as Otho? Perhaps Christ would use His divine power to help him. It might be that He had sent him this inspiration. "Oh! that it might be so," cried Vinicius to himself. He would be avenged on Nero then, for the danger which threatened Lygia, and for the fear which consumed himself. Truth and justice should reign under his sway, and he would spread the religion of Christ from the Euphrates to the fog-begirt shores of Britian. Lygia should be clothed in the purple; he would make her the queen of the world.

But quickly as these thoughts flashed through his brain, they died as quickly. It was necessary above all things to rescue Lygia first. He gazed on the destruction near him, and was seized anew with alarm. The fearful reality of that ocean of fire and smoke overcame the confidence he had hitherto felt in Peter's ability to save Lygia; and a terrible despair came upon him when he emerged from the *Via Portuensis* upon the *Trans-Tiber*. He recovered somewhat when he reached the gate and heard corroborated what other fugitives had told him, that as yet, that part of the city had escaped the conflagration, except in a few places where the fire had crossed the river.

The *Trans-Tiber* was full of smoke, however, and it was well-nigh impossible to reach the centre of the district because of this and the fleeing crowds. Piles of goods had been heaped round the *Naumachia Augusta*, and even in the principal street, by persons whom a greater length of time had given a hope of saving their property. It was utterly impossible to get into the narrow byways for the thick smoke. Thousands were endeavoring to make their way out. Strange sights met the eye of Vinicius. Sometimes two opposite streams of people, meeting in a narrow passage, fought and trampled each other to make a way for themselves. Families got separated, and mothers sought their children in despair. Horror at thought of what must be taking place nearer the flames, raised the hair of the young tribune. Amid the shouts and yells it was a difficult matter to hear or answer inquiries. Now and again, fresh volumes of smoke rolled across the river toward them, so dense and heavy that it completely hid from view all the surrounding objects, making it black as night. Then this would be blown away again, and Vinicius pushed forward

afresh in the direction of the alley where stood the house of Linus. The heat of a July day augmented by the burning city became unbearable. Smoke pained the eyes, and choked the breath. Those of the inhabitants who, in the hope that the fire would not extend beyond the river, had stayed in their homes until then, began now to hurry forth and swell the crowd. The pretorians, hitherto accompanying Vinicius, now lingered behind. Some one in the crowd struck his horse with a hammer; the wounded animal threw up its head, plunged and became almost unmanageable. The throng, now noticing the richness of the tunic worn by Vinicius, knew him to be an Augustian, and at once raised the cry, "Death to Nero and his incendiaries." It was a moment of supreme danger, for many hands were stretched to seize him; but his horse was frightened, and bounded away, trampling down the crowd in his path; another cloud of black smoke rolled past and enveloped all in darkness. Vinicius, seeing the impossibility of riding past, sprang from his horse and pushed through on foot, now slipping along walls, and now waiting for the crowd to pass. He sometimes argued to himself that his efforts were vain, that Lygia might not be there, but had taken refuge in flight. As well look for a pin on the seashore as search for her amidst all that confusion. Still he must reach the house of Linus, even at risk of his life. Now and again, he was compelled to stay, and rub his eyes; now he covered his nose and mouth with a piece torn from his tunic, and ran on. The heat became fiercer as he neared the river. As the fire had started at the Circus Maximus, Vinicius imagined this was from its cinders and from the Forum Boarium and Velabrum which must be now burning. More and more intense it grew. An old man, on crutches, cried, as he fled, "Go not near the bridge of Cestius! the whole island is ablaze!" Such was indeed the case. At the corner of the Vicus Judæorum, where the house of Linus was situated, flames and smoke were pouring forth. The whole island, and a part of the Trans-Tiber were burning; but as yet that end of the street where Lygia lived had escaped the flames.

Vinicius bethought him that a garden surrounded the house, and between that garden and the river was a small field. The thought that the fire might be arrested at this empty space, gave him some comfort, and he ran on eagerly, though smoke and thousands of sparks might start a blaze



"AND YOU CAME TOO LATE?"



at the other end and endanger his return. At last, he beheld the cypresses in the little garden, through the clouds of smoke. The flames had not yet reached the little "insula" of Linus, though the houses across the field were burning briskly. Vinicius gave a grateful glance to heaven and rushed through the closed door.

No one was in the garden, and the house appeared to be empty. "Perhaps the heat and smoke have overcome them," thought Vinicius; then he began to call,

"Lygia! Lygia!"

All was silent. Only the roar of the distant fire could be heard.

"Lygia!"

Suddenly his ear caught again that terrible sound he had once before heard in the garden. The vivarium on the adjacent island near the temple of Esculapius had evidently been caught by the flames. Lions and other wild beasts commenced to roar with terror. Vinicius shivered from head to foot. Those terrible voices seemed to him messengers of evil, to come as omens of misfortune.

This feeling quickly passed; for the roar of the flames, more terrible yet than that of the wild beasts forced him to collect his thoughts. Lygia had not answered him; perhaps she had fainted or was stifled. Vinicius found the little atrium filled with smoke, but no one was there. Finding the door leading to the sleeping rooms, he saw a small lamp, which gleamed upon the lararium where, in place of lares, was a cross under which a taper burned. It seemed to the young catechumen that the taper was sent to him by the cross that he might find Lygia, therefore he took it up and commenced to look for the sleeping rooms. He found one, drew aside the curtains, and looked in.

It was likewise empty. Vinicius knew that it was Lygia's chamber, for some of her clothing hung on nails in the wall, and a capitium lay on the bed. Vinicius took that, and pressing his lips upon it, continued his search. He had soon looked into every room, for the house was small, but no one was to be seen; all must have sought refuge in flight.

"I must search outside the city gates, amid the crowds there," thought Vinicius.

That he had not met them on the Via Portuensis did not surprise him, for they might have taken the opposite direction along the Vatican hill. At least they were safe from

the fire. This thought removed a load from his breast. He was not blind to the many dangers involved in flight, but the knowledge that Ursus possessed almost superhuman strength relieved his fears. "I must endeavor now to cross the gardens of Domitius and reach those of Agrippina where I can find them," said he. "The wind blows from the Sabine hill and the smoke is not so thick there."

It was time to think of his own safety for the flames came ever nearer, and the street was almost hidden in the smoky blackness. Vinicius ran as quickly as he could in the direction from which he had come, but the fire seemed to follow him so closely that he was at times covered with a shower of sparks or enveloped in smoke. His tunic began to smoulder, but he rushed on to avoid being suffocated. The taste of soot was in his mouth, and his throat was parched and hot; at times everything seemed the color of blood. "It would be better to throw myself down and die at once," he thought. It became a greater and greater effort to run, and his head and shoulders were bathed in a scalding perspiration. He mentally repeated the name of Lygia, and wrapped her capitium over his mouth. He no longer remembered the street on which he ran, he was conscious only that he must make for the open field beyond, for there was Lygia, and Peter had promised her to him; he must see, and marry her, and then die.

Still he ran forward, staggering like a drunken man. But now a change took place in that immense conflagration, that which had been before, a hazy glimmering now burst into an ocean of flame. The smoke was borne onward by a gust of hot air, and Vinicius seemed running in a cloud of fire. All around was lit up now, and just as he was about to fall, he saw the end of the street. That sight revived him; he turned the corner into a street leading to the Via Portuensis and Codetan field; sparks no longer fell around him, and he knew if he could once reach there he would be safe, even if he fell unconscious after. When he reached the end of the street, another cloud however, seemed to bar his way. "If that be smoke," he thought, "I cannot make my way through." But he ran on with what little strength remained, throwing off his now burning tunic on the way, but keeping the capitium over his head and mouth. A little farther on he made the discovery that what he had mistaken for smoke was a cloud of dust, from which issued the sound of voices.

"The mob are plundering the houses," he thought. But he ran toward them, for in any case, there were people who might aid him. Making a last effort, he called for help. In his eyes everything became redder still; he struggled for breath, tottered, and fell.

He had been seen, however; and two men ran up to him with gourds of water. Vinicius had sunk down from exhaustion, and was not unconscious. He clutched one of the gourds with both hands, and half-emptied it.

"Thanks," he said; "if ye will raise me to my feet, I can walk."

One of the men poured some water over his head; and they lifted him from the ground and carried him to the rest, who gathered round him inquiring if he were seriously hurt. Vinicius was surprised at this solicitude.

"Who are ye?" he asked.

"We are tearing down the houses, to prevent the fire from spreading to the Via Portuensis," replied one of them.

"Ye came to assist me when I fell. Thanks to you."

"We are not allowed to refuse one help," replied a chorus of voices.

Vinicius had looked on crowds since the morning slaying and plundering with the greatest brutality. He now gazed earnestly on those around him, and said:

"May Christ reward you."

"Blessed be His name!" they answered in chorus.

"Linus?"—inquired Vinicius. But he was not able to say more; he had fainted from excess of feeling and exhaustion. When he recovered consciousness, he was in a garden in the Codetan field, with a number of men and women around him. Again he inquired:

"Where is Linus?"

At first no one replied; then a voice, which Vinicius recognized, replied suddenly:

"He went out two days ago to Ostrianum through the Nomentan Gate. Peace be with thee, O King of Persia."

Vinicius sat up, and beheld Chilo standing before him.

"Thy house must surely be burned, lord, for all the Carinæ is ablaze," said the Greek; "but thou art still as rich as Midas. What a terrible thing! O son of Serapis! the Christians have long foretold the destruction of the city by fire. Linus with Jove's daughter is in Ostrianum. Oh; what calamity!"

Vinicius again became faint.

"Hast thou seen them?" he asked.

"Yes, lord. The gods be praised that I can repay thee for all thy kindness with these tidings. But O Cyrus! I shall still further repay thee, I swear by this burning city."

It was now evening, but the garden was lit up as bright as day by the increasing conflagration. Not merely in parts, but throughout its entire length and breadth the city was burning. The sky was lit up with a red light as far as the eye could reach, and that night in the world's history was a red one.

PART THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

LIGHT from the burning city flooded the sky beyond the reach of the human eye. The moon rose large and full from behind the mountains, and at once took on the color of heated brass. It looked with amazement on the destruction of the world-ruling city. Rose-colored stars were glittering in the rose-colored heavens; but in distinction from usual nights the earth was brighter than the sky. Rome, like a giant pile, illuminated the whole Campania. In the bloody reflection were seen distant mountains, cities, villas, temples, monuments and the aqueducts stretching toward the city from all the adjacent hills; on the aqueducts were swarms of people, hiding there from danger, or looking at the fire.

Macrinus, a weaver, to whose house Vinicius was carried, washed him, gave him clothes and food; after partaking of which and recovering his strength, the young tribune declared that he would search further that very night for Lygia. Macrinus who was a Christian, confirmed Chilo's report that Linus, with Clemence the chief priest, had gone to Ostrianum, where Peter was to baptize a whole company of confessors of the new faith. It was known in Christian quarters that a certain Gaius had been intrusted, some two days ago, to take care of Linus's house. For Vinicius, this was a proof that neither Lygia nor Ursus had remained in the house, and that they also must have gone to Ostrianum.

This thought comforted him greatly. Linus was an old man for whom it was hard to walk every day from the Trans-Tiber to the distant Nomentan Gate; hence it was likely that he stayed a few days with some co-religionist, and with him Lygia and Ursus.—Thus they escaped the fire which in general had not reached the opposite slope of the Esquiline. Vinicius saw in all this the influence of Christ; he felt this care above him and, with a heart full of love more than ever, he swore in his soul to pay with his whole life for those clear marks of favor.

But all the more did he hurry to Ostrianum. He would find Lygia, find Linus and Peter; and would take them to

a distance, to some of his lands, even to Sicily. Rome is burning and in a few days it would be a mere heap of ashes: why then remain amidst disaster and a mad rabble?—There they would be surrounded by a troop of obedient slaves, and by the calm of the country—and would live quietly under Christ's wings, blessed by Peter. Oh, if he could only find them!

But that was no easy thing. Vinicius remembered the difficulty with which he passed from the Appian Way to the Trans-Tiber, and how he must circle around to reach the Via Portuensis, and now he decided to go around the city from the opposite direction. Going by the Via Triumphatoris, and along the river, it was possible to reach the Æmilian bridge; thence passing the Pincian hill, all the Marcian fields, outside the gardens of Pompey, Lucullus and Sallust, to come to the Via Nomentana. That was the shortest way; but Macrinus and Chilo advised him not to take it. The fire had not seized yet that part of the city, it is true; but all the market squares and streets might be entirely crowded with people and their goods. Chilo advised him to go through the Ager Vaticanus to the Porta Flaminia, cross there the river, and push on further outside the walls beyond the gardens of Acilius to the Porta Salaria. After a moment's hesitation, Vinicius consented to follow that advice.

Macrinus had to remain in care of his house; but he obtained two mules, which would serve Lygia in a further journey. He even wanted to give them a slave, but Vinicius refused, saying that the first detachment of pretorians he met on the way would obey his orders. And a moment later he and Chilo started to pursue their way through the Pagus Janiculensis to the Triumphal Way. There were tents there, too, in open places, but it was easier to ride along between them because the greatest part of the inhabitants had fled by the Via Portuensis to the sea. Beyond the Septimian Gate their way stretched between the river and the splendid gardens of Domitius; the mighty cypresses of which were red from the conflagration, as if from evening sunshine. Vinicius urged his mule forward as much as was possible, and Chilo, riding behind him, kept on talking to himself all the way.

"Hurry," urged Vinicius, "what art thou doing there behind?"

"I am weeping over Rome, lord," replied Chilo, "the city of Jupiter."

"Where hadst thou been when the fire began?"

"I was going to my friend Euricius, lord; he kept a shop near the Circus Maximus, and I was meditating on the teachings of Christ when people began to shout: 'Fire! fire!' People gathered around the circus in order to save it, and through curiosity; but when the flames seized the entire Circus, and also commenced to spread in other places, each had to think of his own safety."

"Didst thou see people throwing torches into houses?"

"What have I not seen, O grandson of Æneas!"

"But hast thou seen Lygia and the others at Ostrianum with thy own eyes?"

"I have, O son of Venus! I have seen the maiden, the good Lygian, Holy Linus and the Apostle Peter."

"Before the fire?"

"Before the fire, O Mithra!"

But a doubt rose in the soul of Vinicius whether Chilo was not lying and, stopping his mule, he looked sternly at the old Greek, and asked:

"What wert thou doing there?"

Chilo became confused. True, to him, as to others, it seemed that with the destruction of Rome would come also the end of Roman dominion. But now he was face to face with Vinicius, and remembered that the latter had forbidden him, under a terrible threat, to watch the Christians, and especially Linus and Lygia.

"Lord," said he, "why dost thou not believe me that I love them?—Yes! I was at Ostrianum, as I am half a Christian. Pyrrho has taught me to esteem virtue more than philosophy and therefore I cleave more to virtuous people. And, besides, O Lord, I am poor; and when thou wert at Antium I suffered hunger frequently over my books; and often sat at the wall of Ostrianum, for the Christians, though they are themselves poor, distribute more alms than all the other inhabitants taken together."

This reason seemed sufficient to Vinicius and he inquired less severely:

"And dost thou not know where Linus is residing now?"

"Thou didst punish me once severely for curiosity," replied the Greek.

Vinicius ceased talking and they rode on.

"My lord," said Chilo, after a moment's silence, "thou

wouldst not have found the maiden but for me, and if we find her now thou wilt not forget the poor sage?"

"Thou wilt receive a house and a vineyard at Ameriola," replied Vinicius.

"Thanks to thee, O Hercules! with a vineyard? Thanks to thee! O, yes, with a vineyard?"

They were now riding past the Vatican hill, which was ruddy from the fire; but beyond the Naumachia they turned to the right, so that, passing the Vatican field, they would reach the river, and, crossing it, come to the Porta Flaminia. All at once Chilo reined in his mule, and said:

"A good thought has come to my head, lord."

"Speak!" answered Vinicius.

"Between the Janiculum and Vatican hill, beyond the gardens of Agrippina, are quarries from which stones and sand were taken to build the Circus of Nero. Listen to me, lord! Of late, the Jews, of whom, as thou knowest, there are great numbers in the Trans-Tiber, have begun to persecute the Christians cruelly. Then also rememberest that even in the time of Claudius there were such disturbances there that Cæsar was compelled to expel them from Rome. Now, when they have returned, and when, thanks to the protection of the Augusta, they feel out of danger, they molest the Christians more insolently. I know it! I have seen! Not one edict against Christians has been issued; but the Jews accuse them before the prefect of the city that they murder children, worship an ass, and propagate a religion not recognized by the Senate; they beat them, and attack their houses of prayer so fiercely that the Christians are forced to hide from them."

"What dost thou wish to say?" asked Vinicius.

"This, lord, that synagogues exist openly in the Trans-Tiber, and the Christians, wishing to escape persecution, are compelled to pray in secret, in old sheds, outside the city or in sand pits, which were excavated for the erection of the Circus, and other houses along the Tiber. Now, when the city is perishing, the adherents of Christ are undoubtedly praying. We shall certainly find a countless number of them in the quarry, and I therefore advise thee, lord, to stop there on the way."

"Thou hast said that Linus has gone to Ostrianum," cried Vinicius, impatiently.

"And thou hast promised me a house with a vineyard at Ameriola," answered Chilo; "therefore I wish to seek the

maiden wherever I can hope to find her. They might have turned to the Trans-Tiber after the fire began. They might have gone around outside the city, as we are doing now. Linus has a house; may be he wished to be near it to see if the fire does not seize that part of the city. If they have returned, I swear to thee, lord, by Persophone, that we shall find them at prayer in the quarry; in the worst case we shall get some information concerning them."

"Thou art right," replied Vinicius; "lead me thither."

Chilo led him, accordingly, to the quarry where they found a large number of Christians praying in terror and hope, among whom were Crispus and the Apostle Peter, who, after the prayers were over, promised Vinicius to help him find Lygia.

CHAPTER II.

MEANWHILE the fire had reached the Via Nomentana, and thence, with a change of the wind, turned to the Via Lata and the Tiber, surrounded the Capitol, spread along the Forum Boarium, and, destroying everything it had spared at the first outburst, approached the Palatine hill a second time.

Tigellinus, assembling all the pretorians, sent courier after courier to Cæsar, who was on the way to Rome, with an announcement that he would lose nothing of the grand conflagration, as the fire had increased. But Nero wished to arrive at night in order to sate himself all the better with a view of the perishing city. With this object in view he halted in the neighborhood of Aqua Albana, and, summoning to his tent the tragedian Aliturus, and asked his advice as to what posture he should assume, what look, and expression of face; learned fitting gestures, disputing with the actor whether at the words: "O sacred city which seemed more lasting than Ida," he should raise both hands or, holding the forminga in one, raise only the other. This question seemed to him more important than all others. Starting at last about nightfall, he took council of Petronius whether in the verses depicting the catastrophe he might include a few magnificent blasphemies against the gods, and whether, considered from the standpoint of art, they would not have rushed from the lips of a man who was losing his birthplace.

About midnight he approached the walls with his immense suite composed of whole detachments of nobles, senators, knights, freedmen, slaves, women and children. Sixteen thousand pretorians, arranged in line of battle along the road, guarded the peace and safety of his entrance, and held the excited populace at a proper distance. The people decidedly cursed, shouted and hissed on seeing the retinue, but none dared attack it. In many places was heard the applause of the rabble which, possessing nothing, had lost nothing in the fire, and which hoped for a more bountiful distribution than ever of bread, oil, clothes and money. But shouts, hissing and applause were finally drowned in the blare of trumpets and horns, which Tigellinus had bidden to be sounded.

Nero, on arriving at the Ostian gate, stopped for a moment and said :

“Houseless ruler of a houseless people where wilt thou lay thy unfortunate head for the night?”

Then, passing the Clivus Delphini, he ascended the Appian aqueduct on steps prepared for him purposely, and after him followed the Augustians and a choir of singers, bearing citharæ, lutes, and other musical instruments.

All of them concealed their breath in their breasts, expecting him to say some great words, which for their own safety they ought to remember. But he stood solemn, silent, in a purple robe and adorned with a wreath of golden laurels, gazing at the raging sea of flames. And when Terpnos gave him a golden lute, he raised his eyes to the sky, as if he were waiting for inspiration.

The people pointed at him from afar with their fingers. In the distance fiery serpents were hissing, and the ancient and most sacred edifices were aflame: the temple of Hercules, erected by Evander, and the temple Jupiter, the temple of Luna built by Servius Tullius were burning; the house of Numa Pompilius, the sanctuary of Vesta with the penates of the Roman people were burning; through waving flames the Capitol appeared at intervals; the soul of Rome was burning. But he, Cæsar, stood there with a lute in his hand, with the expression of a tragedian on his face, and with thoughts, not of his perishing country, but of his appearance, and of the pathetic words with which he might best describe the grandeur of the catastrophe, rouse the most admiration and get the warmest plaudits.

He hated that city, he detested its inhabitants, he loved

only his songs and verses, and therefore he rejoiced in the depth of his heart that at last he saw a tragedy like the one he was writing. The verse-maker felt happy, the declaimer was inspired, the seeker for deep emotions was intoxicated with the awful sight, and thought with rapture that even the destruction of Troy was nothing in comparison with the destruction of that giant city. What more could he wish? Rome, the all-powerful Rome, in flames, and he is standing on the arches of the aqueduct with a golden lute, seen by all, robed in purple, admired by all, magnificent, poetic. And down there below, in the darkness the people are muttering and storming. Let them mutter! Centuries will pass, thousands of years will go by, but mankind will remember and glorify the poet, who in that night sang the fall and the burning of Troy. What was Homer if compared with him? What is even Apollo himself with his hollowed-out lute? Here he raised his hands and, striking the strings pronounced the words of Priam.

"O, nest of my fathers, O, cradle dear!" His voice in the open air, with the roar of the conflagration and the distant murmur of several thousand people, seemed wonderfully weak, trembling and low, and the sound of the accompaniment rang like the buzzing of insects. But the senators, dignitaries, and Augustians, assembled on the aqueduct, bowed their heads and listened in silent admiration. He sang long, trying to make his motive ever sadder. At moments when he stopped to catch breath, the chorus of singers repeated the last words, and then Nero again with a gesture learned from Aliturus cast from his shoulder the tragic "*syrma*"* and striking the strings of his lute he sang on. When he had finished at last the song which was composed before, he began to improvise, seeking pictorial comparisons in the spectacle, which was unfolded before him. And his face changed. He was not moved by the destruction of his native city, but he was delighted and moved with the pathos of his own words to such a degree, that suddenly his eyes filled with tears, and at last his lute fell to his feet with a clang. Wrapping himself in his "*syrma*" he stood as if petrified, like one of those statues of Niobe which ornamented the courtyard of the hill of the Palatine.

* A long mantle, mostly worn by tragic actors.

After a short silence a storm of applause struck the air. But this was answered from afar by the howling of multitudes. No one doubted now that Cæsar had given command to burn the city in order to have a spectacle and to sing songs while gazing at it. When he heard that cry from hundreds of thousands, Nero turned to the Augustians with the sad smile of a man who is suffering from injustice and said :

" See how the Quirites value me and poetry."

" Scoundrels!" answered Vatinius, " command the pretorians, lord, to strike them."

Nero turned to Tigellinus :

" Can I rely on the loyalty of the soldiers?"

" Yes, divinity," answered the prefect.

But Petronius shrugged his shoulders,—

" On their loyalty, yes," said he, " but not on their numbers. Remain, meanwhile, where thou art, because here it is safest. The people ought to be pacified."

Seneca and consul Licinus were of this opinion also. At the same time the excitement below was increasing. The people were arming with stones, tent-poles, wagon-sticks and various pieces of iron. After a while some of the cohort leaders came, declaring that the pretorians, pressed by the multitude, are keeping the line of battle with extreme difficulty, and, not having orders to attack the multitude, know not what to do.

" O gods!" said Nero, " what a night! On one side the conflagration, and on the other a raging sea of people!" and he began to seek expressions, which could best describe the danger of the moment, but seeing around him pale faces and restless looks, he was frightened with the others.

" Give me my dark mantle with a hood!" cried he; " will it really come to battle?"

" Lord," said Tigellinus, in an uncertain voice, " I have done all I could do, but the danger is great. . . . Address the people, promise them something!"

" Cæsar shall speak to the multitude? Let somebody else do it in my name. Who will undertake it?"

" I!" calmly answered Petronius.

" Go, my friend; you are the most faithful to me in the moment of danger . . . go, and do not spare promises."

Petronius turned to the retinue with a careless and ironical expression;

"The senators here present and also others, as Piso, Nerva, and Senecio, will go with me."

Then he slowly descended the aqueduct, and those whom he had summoned followed, not without hesitation, but with a certain confidence which his calmness had given them.

At the foot of the arches Petronius halted, and ordered to bring him a white horse which, having mounted, he rode on, at the head of the cavalcade, between the heavy ranks of the pretorians, to the black, howling multitude,—without being armed, having in his hand only a thin ivory cane which he used to carry and to lean on.

When he passed the pretorians, he turned in his horse among the throng. All around, in the light of the fire, upraised hands were visible, armed with every kind of weapon,—inflamed eyes, sweating faces with foaming lips. The infuriated sea of people surrounded him and his guard, and all around was a sea of heads, moving, roaring and dreadful.

The cries even increased and became an inhuman roar; the multitude shook canes, forks, and even swords over the head of Petronius; grasping hands were stretched toward his horse's reins, but he rode farther on, in the middle of the multitude, cool, indifferent, contemptuous. From time to time he struck with his cane over the heads of the most insolent people, as if he would simply clear a road for himself in an ordinary crowd, and that confidence of his, that calmness amazed the roaring mass. But at last they recognized Petronius, and voices began to shout:

"Petronius! *Arbiter Elegantiarum!* Petronius!"

And the more that name was repeated, the faces about became less terrible, the raging less savage; for that elegant patrician, who had never striven for the favor of the people, was none the less their favorite. He was regarded as a humane, magnanimous man; and his popularity had increased, especially since the affair of Pedanius Secundus, when Petronius endeavored to mitigate the cruel sentence, condemning to death all the slaves of that prefect. The slaves loved him more especially since then with that increasing love which only the oppressed and unfortunate feel to those who show them some sympathy. Besides, in that moment, they were curious to know what the envoy of Cæsar would say, for no one doubted that he was purposely sent by Cæsar.

And he, removing his white toga trimmed with scarlet,

raised it in the air, and waved it above his head, in sign that he wished to speak.

"Silence! silence!" the people cried on all sides.

In a moment there was silence. Then he straightened himself on his horse and said in a clear, calm voice,—

"Citizens, let those who hear me repeat my words to those who are far from me, and let all of you bear yourselves like men, not like beasts in the arena."

"We listen, we listen!"

"Then listen. The city will be rebuilt. The gardens of Lucullus, Mæcenas, Cæsar, and Agrippina will be opened to you. To-morrow will begin the distribution of wheat, wine, and oil of olives, so that every man may fill his stomach up to the throat. Then Cæsar will have games for you, such as the world has never seen, and during these games banquets and gifts will be given to you. Ye will be richer after the fire than before it."

He was answered by a murmur which spread from the centre in all directions, as rings spread on water in which a stone has been cast: those nearer repeated his words to those who were standing more distant. And afterward here and there cries of anger or applause were heard, which turned into one common cry:

"Panem et circences!!!"

Petronius wrapped himself in his toga and for a time listened without moving, resembling a statue in his white garment. The uproar increased, drowned the roar of the fire, was heard from afar, but the envoy had probably something more to say, for he waited.

And finally he raised his hand, commanding silence, and shouted:

"I promised you 'Panem et circences,' and now give a shout in honor of Cæsar, who feeds and clothes you,—and then go to sleep, beloved populace, for the dawn will soon begin!"

After saying this, he turned his horse, and tapping lightly with his cane the heads of the people who stood in his way, he rode slowly to the ranks of the pretorians.

In a moment he was at the aqueduct. He found almost a panic above. There they did not understand the shout "Panem et circences," and concluded that this is a new outburst of anger. They did not hope even that Petronius would save himself; and therefore Nero, when he saw him,

ran to the steps and with a face pale from emotion began to make inquiries,—

“Well? what is there? Is there a battle already?”

Petronius sighed deeply and answered,—

“I swear by Pollux! How they stench! Let some one give me an epillimma or I will faint.” Then he turned to Cæsar and said,—

“I have promised wheat, oil, the opening of the gardens, and games. They worship thee anew, and are shouting with dry tongues in thy honor. O, gods! what a foul smell those plebeians have!”

“I had pretorians ready,” cried Tigellinus; “and had you not quieted them the shouters would have been silenced forever! I am sorry, Cæsar, that thou didst not let me use force.”

Petronius looked at him, shrugged his shoulders and said,—

“The time is not lost as yet. Thou mayst have to use it to-morrow.”

“No, no!” cried Cæsar, “I will give command to open the gardens to them, and distribute bread. Thanks to thee, Petronius, I will have for them games; and that song, which I sang to-day, I will sing publicly.”

After he had said that, he placed his hands on the shoulder of Petronius, and after looking at him silently for a moment, inquired:

“Tell me openly, how did I seem to thee while I was singing?”

“Thou wert worthy of the spectacle, and the spectacle was worthy of thee,” answered Petronius. And then turning toward the conflagration he said:

“But let us have one more look and bid farewell to ancient Rome.”

CHAPTER III.

THE words of the Apostle inspired the Christians with hope. The end of the world seemed ever nearer to them, but they began to think that the terrible judgment is far off, that they would, perhaps, first see the end of Cæsar's reign, which they looked on as the reign of Satan, and see the punishment of God meted out to Cæsar for his crimes. Reassured, the Christians began to leave their subterranean

ous places, and dispersed to their temporary abodes, and even to the Trans-Tiber; for news had reached them, that the fire, started there in several places, and driven by the wind toward the river, had consumed everything inflammable, and was now subsiding.

The Apostle, accompanied by Vinicius and Chilo, also left the excavation. The young tribune did not venture to interrupt his prayers; he walked in silence, and imploringly looked on Peter. People crowded around the Apostle,—mothers held out their children to him, some kissed his hands and the hem of his garment, others kneeled and begged a blessing from him; so there was no time for questions. Only when they were in the open space, from which the burning city was seen, did the Apostle, first thrice making the sign of the cross, turn to Vinicius.

“Do not be alarmed,” said he. “The hut of the quarryman is not far from here; there thou wilt find Lygia with Linus and her faithful servant. Christ, who predestined her for thee, preserved her.”

The road from Antium, the adventures at the city wall, the search for Lygia in the blinding smoke, sleeplessness, and his constant alarm, had almost entirely exhausted Vinicius. The news that Lygia was near deprived him of whatever strength was left in him, and he tottered, and fell to the feet of the Apostle, embraced his knees, and remained in that position, unable to utter a word.

Warding off the thanks of Vinicius, the Apostle said:

“Not to me, not to me, but to Christ.”

The voice of Chilo was heard from behind:

“What a powerful God! But I know not what to do with the mules that are waiting down here.”

“Rise and come with me,” said Peter, taking Vinicius by the hand.

Vinicius rose. By the light of the conflagration tears were seen on his face, which was pale from emotion. His lips were moving as if in prayer.

“Let us go,” he said.

But Chilo again repeated: “What shall I do with the mules? They are waiting down here. Perhaps the worthy prophet prefers riding to walking?”

Vinicius told him to take the mules to Macrinus. Chilo reminded Vinicius of the house in Ameriola, which trifle could be forgotten in such a terrible conflagration; and when Vinicius promised that he should get it, he said:

"O grandson of Numa Pompilius, thou art always worthy of credence, but now that the Apostle has heard thy promise, I will remind thee also of the vineyard thou has promised me. Pax vobiscum. I will find thee, master. Pax vobiscum."

"And peace with thee," they answered, and they turned toward the hills. On the way Vinicius said:

"Master, wash me with the water of baptism, that I may call myself a true worshipper of Christ, for I love Him with all the power of my soul. I am ready in heart, and what thou commandest, I will do; but tell me what to do."

"Love men as thy brothers," answered the Apostle; "for only with love mayst thou serve Him."

"Yes, I understand and feel that. When I was a child, I believed in the Roman gods, but did not love them; but I love the One God, and would gladly give my life for Him."

"And he will protect thee and thy house," added the Apostle.

They were approaching the hut, which looked more like a cave hewn from the rock of the hill. From an opening, which served for a window, a giant figure asked them:

"Who are ye?"

"Servants of Christ," answered Peter. "Peace be with thee, Ursus."

Linus was lying on a bundle of straw. Beside him sat Lygia, holding a string of fish, apparently intended for supper. She was removing a fish from the string, and did not raise her eyes, thinking that Ursus had entered. Vinicius approached her, called her by name, and held out his hand. She quickly sprang to her feet and threw herself into his arms. There was no end to their delight, love and happiness. He offered to take her to Antium, as the slaves had revolted in Rome, and were robbing everybody, and people were cutting each other's throats. From Antium they would sail for Sicily, and he would return her to Pomponia, and afterward take her back. He wished to be a real confessor of Christ, and to be baptized. His lands were their lands; his houses, their houses.

Bending over to kiss Vinicius's hand, Lygia said with submission:

"Where thou art Caius, there am I, Caia."

Lygia stood with drooping head, blushing deeply, as if in doubt whether he would take ill her words. But in his

face boundless adoration was depicted. Turning to Peter, Vinicius resumed :

"Rome is burning 'at the command of Cæsar. In Antium he had already expressed a desire to see a burning city. If he could resolve upon such an infamous act, think what may happen yet. Who knows but that he may call in his soldiers, and order them to slaughter the inhabitants? Who knows that proscriptions, civil war with all its horrors will not follow the conflagration? Hide yourself, and let us hide Lygia. In Sicily you will await the passing of the storm, and when it is over, you will return to sow the seed."

As if in confirmation of Vinicius's apprehensions, from the Ager Vaticanus came cries of madness and terror. At that moment the quarryman entered, and quickly closing the door, cried :

"People are killing each other at the Circus of Nero! The gladiators and slaves have attacked the citizens!"

"Do ye hear?" asked Vinicius.

"The cup is overflowing," said the Apostle, "and disasters will come like a boundless sea."

Then he turned to Vinicius, and pointing to Lygia, added :

"Take her whom God had predestined for thee, and protect her. Let the sick Linus and Ursus go with you."

But Vinicius, who had come to love Peter with all the impetuosity of his soul, exclaimed :

"I swear to thee, my teacher, that thou wilt stay here to thy destruction!"

"May God bless thee for thy intentions," answered the Apostle; "but hast thou not heard that Christ had thrice repeated on the lake: 'Feed my lambs'?"

Vinicius was silent.

"If thou, who hast not been confided with my care, wilt not leave me to destruction, how can I run from my flock in the day of disaster? When a storm had overtaken us on the lake, and we were alarmed, He did not forsake us; how then, can I, His servant, do otherwise than follow His example?"

Linus raised his withered face, and asked :

"O vicegerent of God, why should I not follow thy example?"

Vinicius passed his hand across his forehead as if struggling with himself or his thoughts, and then spoke in a voice ringing with the energy of a Roman soldier

"Listen to me, Peter, Linus and thou, Lygia! I spoke as my human reason dictated, but your reason is different; it does not think of personal safety, but of the commands of the Redeemer. I did not understand that, because my eyes were not opened, and the former man is still in me. But I love Christ, and wish to be His servant; and though it is a question not merely of my life, I here kneel before ye, and swear that I will carry out the commands of love, and will not forsake my brethren in the day of trouble."

He kneeled, and suddenly he was possessed by an inspiration, his hand and eyes were raised, and he cried: "Is it possible that I understand Thee, Christ? Am I worthy of Thee?"

His hands trembled; tears were running down his cheeks. Peter took an earthen vessel with water, approached Viničius and said, triumphantly:

"I baptize thee in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen."

CHAPTER IV.

THE Romans camped in the magnificent gardens of Cæsar, once the gardens of Domitius and Agrippina, on the field of Martius, in the gardens of Pompey, Sallust and Mæcenæ. They occupied all the places,—the porticos, open spaces intended for ball playing, summerhouses, and the buildings erected for wild beasts. Peacocks, flamingoes, swans and ostriches, African gazelles and antelopes, deer and chamois, which served as ornaments for those gardens, were killed and eaten. Provisions were brought from Ostia in such abundance, that one could cross the Tiber on the boats that were filled with them. Bread sold as low as three sesteria, and the poor received it without money. Great quantities of wine, olives and chestnuts were brought; from the mountains great flocks of cattle were driven in. Such as before the fire were constantly on the verge of starvation, were having enough of everything. The danger of famine was averted, but the robberies, murders and other abuses were more difficult to suppress. A nomadic life insured immunity to thieves and robbers, especially since they became the loudest admirers of Cæsar, following him with hand-clapping wherever he went in public. While all

the public institutions were by force of circumstances closed, and the armed force was not strong enough to keep order, things happened in the city, inhabited by the dregs of the world, that passed human imagination. Not a night passed without fights and murders; women and children were stolen; near the Porta Mugionis, where the cattle were kept, actual battles were fought in which hundreds of people were killed. Drowned people were found every morning on the banks of the Tiber. As there was no one to inter them, the bodies decayed, and filled the air with offensive smells. Then sickness broke out, and timid people feared a pestilence.

And the city still burned. Only on the sixth day, the fire, reaching the Esquiline, on which a larger number of houses were purposely demolished, began to abate. But the piles of burning cinders emitted such strong light that the people would not believe that the end of the catastrophe had come. In fact, on the seventh night the fire broke out in the house of Tigellinus, but having little to feed on, the fire did not last long. Here and there burned houses collapsed, sending pillars of flame and sparks to the sky. Gradually the surface of the entire mass of ruins was turning grey; the sky, after sunset ceased to gleam with the bloody reflection, and only at night on the dark expanse blue tongues of flame rose from the burning cinders.

Of the fourteen divisions of Rome, only four remained, among these the Trans-Tiber. All the rest were consumed by the fire. From the Tiber to the Esquiline stretched a vast expanse of grey ashes, gloom and death. Rows of chimneys stood out here and there like columns over graves in a cemetery. Among these columns people flitted about by day in search of valuables or the bones of dear ones, and dogs howled by night.

All the generosity of Cæsar in furnishing aid to the people did not stop calumny and indignation. Only the crowd of thieves and homeless vagrants were satisfied; but those who had lost those dear to them and all their property, could not be bribed by the opening of the gardens, the distribution of food, gifts, and by the games. Those in whom there was a spark of love for their native city were driven to despair by the news that the ancient name of "Roma" was to disappear, and that Cæsar had determined to name the new city Neropolis. The wave of dissatisfaction rose higher and higher, and despite the flatteries of the Augus-

tians, and the lies of Tigellinus, Cæsar more sensitive than all the preceding Cæsars to the moods of the crowd, thought with alarm that in the mortal struggle which he was waging with the patricians in the Senate, he might find no support. The Augustians themselves were no less alarmed,—any morning might bring them ruin. Tigellinus thought of bringing a few legions from Asia Minor; Vatinius, who laughed even when smitten on the cheek, lost his good humor; Vitellius lost his appetite.

A consultation was held for the purpose of devising ways of throwing off the responsibility for the fire from their shoulders. But to do that it was necessary to clear Cæsar from all suspicion, otherwise nobody would believe them innocent of the crime. With that end in view, Tigellinus consulted Domitius Afer, and even with Seneca, though he hated him. Poppæa also understood that the ruin of Nero would be her own death sentence; she therefore sought the opinion of her confidants and the Hebrew priests, for it had been rumored for some years past that she was a devotee of Jehovah. Nero had his own methods, often terrible, and as often foolish, and sometimes fell into terror, sometimes was as playful as a child, and for the most part complained against everybody.

In the house of Tigellinus, which had survived the fire, Petronius once expressed the opinion that it would be best to go to Greece, thence to Egypt and Asia Minor. The journey had long before been decided upon; why defer it longer, when in Rome it was lonesome and not entirely safe?

Cæsar enthusiastically accepted the advice, but Seneca, after meditating a while, said:

“It is easy to go, but it will be difficult to return.”

“By Heracles!” answered Petronius, “we may return at the head of the Asiatic legions.”

“I will do so!” exclaimed Nero.

But Tigellinus opposed. He could make no suggestions of his own; had such an idea occurred to him, he would beyond doubt have declared it a salutary method of escape, but to admit it now was to admit that Petronius was the only man who, in a supreme moment, could save them all from ruin.

“Hear me, divine Cæsar!” said he, “this advice, if followed, will lead to ruin. Before thou reachest Ostia a civil war will break out, and who knows but that some descend-

ant of the divine Augustus will declare himself Cæsar; and what shall we do if the legions take his side?"

"We will see that no descendants of Augustus are left. There are few of them now, and it is easy to rid ourselves of them."

"It is not difficult, but will that settle the matter? Only yesterday my people heard in the crowd that a man like Pætus Thræsea should be Cæsar."

Nero bit his lips, then raised his eyes and said:

"The insatiable ingrates! They have flour enough, and have coal enough to bake their bread on,—what more do they want?"

"Vengeance," said Tigellinus.

Silence followed, which was broken by Cæsar rising suddenly, and beginning to declaim: "Hearts thirst for vengeance, and vengeance thirsts for a victim." Then, forgetting everything, he exclaimed, his face radiant with joy:

"Give me the tablet and stilus; I will write down the stanza. Lucan never wrote anything like it. Did you notice that the stanza came into my head in a twinkling?"

"O incomparable!" exclaimed several voices. Nero wrote down the stanza, and said:

"Yes, vengeance thirsts for a victim!" Then he cast a glance on those around him. "Suppose we spread the report that Vatinius ordered the city to be burned, and sacrifice him to the anger of the populace?"

"Divine Cæsar! But I am insignificant!" exclaimed Vatinius.

"True. We must have a more important man than you. Vitellius, perhaps?"

Vitellius turned pale, but began to laugh.

"My fat might start the fire again," he said.

But Nero had something else on his mind. He was looking for a sacrifice that would really satisfy the people's anger, and found it.

"Tigellinus," he asked, a moment later, "it was thou who didst set fire to Rome!"

The listeners shuddered. They understood that Cæsar was no more joking, and that eventful times were coming.

Tigellinus's face was convulsively drawn like that of a dog preparing for an attack.

"I have burned Rome at thy command," he said. And they looked at each other like two demons. In the ensuing silence the buzzing of the bees in the atrium could be heard.

"Tigellinus," said Nero, "dost thou love me?"

"Thou knowest that I do."

"Sacrifice thyself for me!"

"Divine Cæsar," answered Tigellinus, "why dost thou offer me the sweet cup which I cannot place to my lips? The people are muttering and rising; dost thou wish the pretorians also to rise?"

The hearts of the people present throbbed with alarm. Tigellinus was pretorian prefect, and these words implied a threat. Nero himself understood this, and his face became pallid.

At that moment Epaphroditus, a freedman of Cæsar, entered announcing that the divine Augusta wished to see Tigellinus; that people came to her apartments whom the prefect must hear.

Tigellinus bowed to Cæsar and walked out with a face calm and contemptuous. When a hand was raised against him, he could show who he was; and knowing Nero's cowardice, he was sure that the ruler of the world would not dare to strike him.

The Augustians waited for Cæsar to say something.

"I have raised a serpent on my bosom," he finally said.

Petronius shrugged his shoulders as if to say that it was not difficult to snap the head off such a serpent.

"What dost thou say? Speak, give thy advice!" cried Nero, who noticed his motion. "I trust in thee alone, for thou art wiser than all of them, and thou lovest me."

The answer was on the tip of Petronius's tongue: "Appoint me pretorian prefect. I will hand Tigellinus over to the people, and pacify the city in a day." But his innate laziness prevailed. To be a pretorian prefect meant to bear on his shoulders Cæsar's person and a thousand public affairs. What need has he of the troubles attending the position? Is it not better to read poetry in a luxurious library, fondle Eunice on his breast, play with her golden hair, and kiss her coral lips?

"My advice is to go to Achæa."

"Ah!" answered Nero. "I looked for more from thee. The Senate hates me. Who will guarantee that after my departure the flag of revolt will not be raised, and some one else declared Cæsar? Heretofore the people were faithful to me, but now they will follow the Senate. By Hades! if the people and the Senate had but one head!"—

"Divine Cæsar! Permit me to tell thee that to preserve

Rome it is necessary to preserve some Romans," said Petronius, smiling.

"What care I for Rome and Romans! I should be obeyed in Achæa, but treachery is all around me here. Everybody is deserting me, and you are ready to turn traitors. I know it, I know it. You do not even think what future generations will say of you if you desert such an artist as I am."

Striking his forehead, he exclaimed:

"Yes, amid these troubles even I forget who I am!" With a radiant face he turned to Petronius:

"Petronius," he said, "the people murmur; but if I take my cithara and go to the Martius field, if I sing that song which I sang during the fire, thinkest thou I will not move them with my song even as Orpheus once moved the wild beasts?"

To this, Tullius Senecio, who was anxious to get back to his slave women, said:

"Undoubtedly, Cæsar, if they only let you begin."

"Let us go to Hellas!" said Nero with disgust.

But at that moment Poppæa entered, followed by Tigellinus, as proud as a triumphator entering the Capitol. All eyes turned upon him. He spoke slowly and with emphasis:

"Listen to me, Cæsar, for I can say: I have found it! The people want vengeance and sacrifice,—not one, but hundreds and thousands. Master, hast thou not heard who Christ was,—he who was crucified by Pontius Pilate? Thou knowest then who the Christians are? Have I not told thee of their crimes and dissolute ceremonies; of their predictions that fire would cause the end of the world? The people hate and suspect them. They never go to our temples, for they consider our gods evil spirits; they are not in the Stadium, for they despise the races. Never has the hand of a Christian honored thee with applause. Not one of them recognizes thee as god. They are the enemies of the human race, of Rome, and of thee. The people murmur at thee, but thou hast given me no command to burn Rome, and I did not burn it. The people demand vengeance; let them be gratified. The people want blood and games; let them have them. The people suspect thee; let their suspicion be turned in another direction."

Cæsar was at first perplexed, but as Tigellinus proceeded, his actor's face changed, and assumed in succession ex-

pressions of anger, grief, sympathy and indignation. Suddenly he rose, threw off his toga, raised his hands, and for a moment stood silent. Then he began in tragic voice:

"Zeus, Apollo, Hera, Athene, Persephone, and all ye immortal gods! Why have ye not come to our aid? What has this hapless city done to these villains that they burned it so inhumanly?"

"They are enemies of mankind and of thee," said Poppæa.

Others began to uphold her.

"Deal justice! Punish the incendiaries! The gods themselves cry for revenge!"

Nero sat down, lowered his head, and was silent, as if the infamy which he had heard, stunned him. But in a moment he waved his hand and said:

"What punishments, what tortures befit such a crime? But the gods will inspire me, and with the aid of the powers of Tartarus I will give to my people such a spectacle that for ages people will think of me with gratitude."

Petronius's face was suddenly overcast as with a cloud. He thought of the danger threatening Lygia, Vinicius and all those people, whose religion he rejected, but of whose innocence he was certain. He foresaw a bloody orgy which the eyes of an æsthetic could not tolerate. But first of all he thought of saving Vinicius, who would go mad if that girl perished. This consideration outweighed every other, although Petronius well knew that this was the most dangerous game he ever played.

Nevertheless he began to speak with the same carelessness and freedom which he employed when criticising the want of taste in Cæsar and the Augustians.

"So ye have found a victim? Very well! Ye may send it to the arena, or array it in a 'tunic of distress.' And that is well, too. But listen to me: ye have authority, ye have pretorians, ye have power; then be sincere, at least, when no one is listening. Deceive the people, but do not deceive one another. Give the Christians to the populace, sentence them to what tortures ye will, but have the boldness to confess to yourselves that it was not they who burned Rome. Ye call me 'arbiter elegantiarum'; hence, I tell ye that I cannot bear vulgar comedies. Ah, how all this reminds me of the show-booths of the Porta Asinaria, where clowns, for the amusement of the suburban rabble, play the parts of gods and kings, and after the performance wash

down the onions with sour wine, or get blows for their pay. Be gods and kings in reality, for I say that ye can afford it. As for thee, Cæsar,—thou hast threatened us with the judgment of future ages, but remember that they will judge thee also. By the divine Clio! Nero, ruler of the world, Nero, a god, burned Rome because he was as all-powerful on earth as was Zeus on Olympus; Nero the poet loved poetry so much that he sacrificed his country to it! From the beginning of the world no man was bold enough to venture on such an undertaking. I adjure thee in the name of the nine Libethrides, renounce not such glory,—all future ages will sing thy praise. Thou wilt overshadow Priam, Agamemnon, Achilles, the very gods! To burn Rome is not merely a good deed, it is great and unusual! And I tell thee, besides, that the people raise their hand against thee. Have courage; guard against acts unworthy of thee, that our descendants may not say: ‘Nero burned Rome, but as a timid Cæsar and a timid poet, he made cowardly denial of the great act, and cast the blame of it on the innocent!’”

His words, as usual, made a strong impression on Nero, but he was not deceived as to this,—that he was employing a desperate means, which by chance might save the Christians, but might more easily destroy himself. But he did not hesitate, for it was at once a question of Vinicius whom he loved, and of hazard which amused him. “*Jacta alea est*,” he thought, “and we shall see how far fear for his own life outweighs in the monkey his love of glory.”

And in the depth of his soul he had no doubt that fear would outweigh.

His words were followed by silence. Poppæa and all the others were looking intently at Cæsar, who began raising his lips, drawing them to his very nostrils,—in him a sign of indecision. He finally seemed confused and dissatisfied.

On noting which Tigellinus cried:

“Lord, permit me to depart. Thy person is being exposed to destruction; thou art called a cowardly Cæsar, a timid poet, an incendiary, a clown,—my ears cannot suffer such expressions.”

“I have lost,” thought Petronius, but turning to Tigellinus, he measured him with a glance full of that contempt which a great patrician and exquisite man feels for a worthless scamp, and said:

"Tigellinus, it was thou whom I called a clown; and thou art one even now."

"Is it because I will not listen to thy insults?"

"It is because thou showest a boundless love for Cæsar, and but a moment since thou hast threatened him with pretorians, which we all understood, as did Cæsar."

Tigellinus, who never expected Petronius to throw such dice upon the table, turned pale, became confused, and lost his speech. But this was Petronius's last victory over his antagonist, for Poppæa immediately broke in:

"Master, how canst thou permit that even such a thought should get into any one's head, the more so to be expressed aloud in thy presence!"

"Punish the audacity!" exclaimed Vitellius.

Nero again raised his lips, and turning on Petronius his glassy, shortsighted eyes, said:

"Is this the way thou payest for my favors?"

"If I am mistaken, show me my error," said Petronius; "but know that I say that which my love for thee dictates."

"Punish the audacity!" repeated Vitellius.

"Punish!" echoed a number of voices.

All was noise and commotion in the atrium. Everybody was drawing away from Petronius. Even Tullius Senecio, his constant friend at the court, and young Nerva, who had shown him the greatest friendship, drew away. Petronius stood alone on the left side of the atrium, and, with a smile on his lips, waited for what Cæsar would say or do.

"Ye wish me to punish him," said Cæsar, "but he is my friend and comrade, and though he has stung me in the heart, let him know that for friends this heart has only forgiveness."

"I have lost, and am ruined," thought Petronius.

Cæsar rose, and the consultation was ended.

CHAPTER V.

PETRONIUS returned home. Nero and Tigellinus went to Poppæa's atrium. They were expected there by those with whom the prefect had already spoken.

Two Trans-Tiber rabbis, attired in long robes, and wearing mitres, a young copyist, their assistant, together with Chilo, were there. The priests paled at sight of Cæsar, and

with hands uplifted, inclined their heads reverently to his hands.

"Be greeted, O ruler of the earth, protector of the chosen people, and Cæsar, a lion among men, whose reign may be likened to sunlight, to the cedar of Lebanon, to a spring, to the palm, to the balsam of Jericho."

"Refuse ye to call me god?" he asked.

At this the priests grew paler. The chief among them said,—

"Thy words, O lord, are as sweet as a bunch of grapes, or a ripe fig,—for Jehovah has filled thy heart with goodness! Cæsar Caius, the predecessor of thy father, was stern; yet our envoys did not address him as such, preferring rather to die than violate the law."

"Wherefore, did not Caligula command that they should be thrown to the lions?"

"Not so, lord; he feared the anger of Jehovah."

The very name of Jehovah gave them courage and confidence. Raising their bowed heads they looked Nero in the face.

"Do ye charge the Christians with the burning of Rome?" he asked.

"We accuse them, lord, of but one thing,—that they are enemies of the law, of mankind, of Rome, and of thee; that they have long since threatened the city and the world with fire. This man will tell thee the rest. His lips have never been sullied by an untruth, for the blood of the chosen people flowed in his mother's veins."

"Who art thou?" asked Nero, turning to Chilo.

"One who honors thee, O Cyrus. Besides this, I am a poor Stoic"—

"I detest the Stoics," said Nero. "I hate Thræsea, Musonius, and Cornutus. Their speech repulses me, as does their aversion for art, and their preferred filth and squalor."

"O lord, Seneca, thy master, has a thousand tables of citrus wood. If it is thy wish I shall have double this number. Necessity makes me a Stoic. O Radiant One, set a garland of roses on my stoicism, a pitcher of wine before it, and it will sing such Anacreon strains as must deafen the ears of every Epicurean."

The title of "Radiant" was pleasing to Nero, and caused him to smile.

"Thou dost please me," he said.

"This man is worth his weight in gold," said Tigellinus



“AND NOT ONLY THEY, BUT I—I BELONG TO THEIR FAITH.”

"The wind must blow my reward away," answered Chilo, "if thou dost not put thy liberality with my weight."

"He would not outweigh Vitellius," said Cæsar.

"Eheu! Silver-bowed, my wit is not of lead."

"Thy faith does not prevent thee from calling me a god."

"O Immortal! In thee rests my faith; the Christians blaspheme against that faith, therefore I hate them."

"What knowest thou of the Christians?"

"Have I thy permission to weep, O divinity!"

"Weeping annoys me," answered Nero.

"Thou art triply right, since eyes that have once beheld thee should never weep more. O lord, protect me against my enemies."

"Speak of the Christians," said Poppæa, with some impatience.

"At thy command, O Isis," said Chilo. "My whole life has been devoted to philosophy, and in search of the truth. Among the divine sages of old, in the Academy of Athens, and in the Serapeum of Alexandria, have I sought it. Hearing of the Christians I thought that they had founded some new school wherein I might discover certain truths. It was to my misfortune that I made their acquaintance. One Glaucus, a physician of Naples, was the first Christian whose acquaintance I made. He informed me they worshipped a certain Chrestos, who, in return for helping him to exterminate the children of Deucalion, promised to them the destruction of all other people, and every city in the world. It is this, O lady, that makes them hate men, poison fountains, curse Rome in their assemblies, and all the temples wherein we do honor to our gods. This Chrestos was crucified, but he promised when Rome was burned down and utterly destroyed, that he would appear again, and give to the Christians dominion over the entire world."

"Now we understand why Rome was destroyed," interrupted Tigellinus.

"That is known to many already, O lord, but if ye hear me to the end, I shall make known to ye the motive for my vengeance. Glaucus did not tell me at first that the Christian religion taught hatred, but instead would have me believe that Chrestos was a good divinity, and that love formed the basis of their religion. My heart accepted this as true. I began to love Glaucus, to trust him. I shared my bread with him, my money, and wouldst thou know,

lady, how he rewarded me for all this? He thrust a knife into my body on the way from Naples to Rome, and my wife, the beautiful and young Berenice, he disposed of to a slave-merchant. If Sophocles but knew my history—but what is it I say? One better than Sophocles hears me.”

“Poor man!” cried Poppæa.

“He is not poor, lady, who has seen the face of Aphrodite and at this moment such is my privilege and delight. After this I sought consolation in philosophy. Coming to Rome I sought to obtain justice against Glaucus. I thought the Christian elders whom I went to see would cause my wife to be restored to me. I made the acquaintance of their chief priest, with Paul, who was a prisoner in this city, with the son of Zebedee, with Linus and Clitus, and many others. I know where they abode before the fire, and where they now meet. There is an excavation in the Vatican hill, and a cemetery beyond the Nomentan Gate, where they hold their shameless ceremonies. I can point out these places. I saw Peter the Apostle there. I saw how children were killed by Glaucus, that the Apostle might not want for something to sprinkle on the heads of his followers. I saw Lygia, too, who boasted that if unable to offer the blood of a child, she brought about the death of one, since she it was who bewitched the infant Augusta, thy daughter, O Cyrus, and thine, O Isis.”

“Hearst thou, Cæsar?” asked Poppæa.

“Is that possible!” exclaimed Nero.

“Wrongs done myself I can forgive,” said Chilo, “but for those done ye, I was seized with a desire to stab her. Before I could do so, however, I was prevented by the noble Vinicius who is in love with her.”

“Vinicius? But then she fled from him.”

“Even so, but he sought her out, since he could not live without her. I accepted his wretched pay and helped him to find her, since it was I who showed him the house in the Trans-Tiber where she lived among the Christians. I accompanied him to this house, and with us was thy wrestler Croton whom he had hired. But Ursus, the slave of Lygia, broke his back. This Ursus is a man of wonderful strength, O lord. He can break a bull’s neck with as great ease as another would a poppy stalk. For this he was loved by Aulus and Pomponia.”

“By Hercules,” cried Nero; “he who crushed Croton is deserving a statue in the Forum. But if not inventing, old

man, thou art surely mistaken, since Croton was killed by the knife of Vinicius."

"It is thus that people slander the gods. I saw Ursus crush his ribs in myself, O lord, and he would have killed Vinicius, too, but for Lygia. They nursed Vinicius through the long illness that followed his encounter with Ursus, hoping through love to make a Christian of him in which they have succeeded."

"Vinicius?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps Petronius, also?" suggested Tigellinus, quickly.

Chilo felt uneasy, and rubbing his hands, hastened to add,—

"Thy penetration, O lord, compels my admiration. He may indeed have become one. It is very possible."

"This tells me why he defended the Christians."

"Petronius a Christian!" and Nero laughed as he said this. "Petronius an enemy of life and luxurious ease. Do not ask me to give credence to this statement. I am not prepared to believe in anything thou mayst tell me."

"The noble Vinicius did most certainly become a Christian, O lord. I swear I tell thee the truth. Nothing so disgusts me as lying. Pomponia Græcina, little Aulus, Lygia, and Vinicius are all Christians. Though I had served him faithfully, he had me flogged at the wish of Glaucus, notwithstanding that I was old, and sick, and hungry. I have sworn not to forget it to him. I will deliver up to thee Peter the Apostle, Linus, Clitus, Glaucus, Crispus, and Lygia and Ursus, O lord, if thou wilt but avenge my wrongs. Not hundreds but thousands of these Christians shall I point out to thee; their places of worship, their cemeteries,—not all thy prisons will contain them! Ye could not find them without me. In philosophy alone I have hitherto sought consolation, now I look for it in favors. I am old, and have not known what life is; let me begin."

"Thou desirest to be a Stoic before a full plate," said Nero.

"Who renders thee service must fill it by that same."

"Thou sayst aright, O philosopher."

Poppæa had not forgotten her enemies. Her fancy for Vinicius, at first a whim, had been nursed into a feeling of anger and offended vanity. The indifference of Vinicius

had aroused her jealousy against Lygia whom she hated deeply both on account of that and her beauty, which latter occasioned her much alarm and perturbation of mind. She knew that in all Rome she need fear no rival but Lygia. For this she had vowed her ruin.

"Lord," she cried, "avenge our child."

"Hasten! hasten!" cried Chilo, "lest Vinicius hide her. I know the house to which she returned after the fire."

"Thou canst have ten men, and go this very moment," said Tigellinus.

"O lord! hadst thou but seen Croton in the arms of Ursus; with fifty men I could but show the house from a distance. But Vinicius must be imprisoned or I am lost."

Tigellinus glanced at Nero. "Would it not be well, O divinity, to deal with uncle and nephew at once?"

"Not now," said Nero, after a moment's thought. "We would not be believed if we sought to persuade the people that Rome had been fired by Petronius, Vinicius, or Pomponia. Their houses were too splendid for that. To-day other victims are necessary; their turn must come later."

"O lord, let me have soldiers as a guard," said Chilo.

"Tigellinus, see to this," said Nero.

"Thou wilt lodge with me in the meantime," said the prefect to Chilo.

Joy and happiness showed themselves on the face of the Greek as he heard this.

"I will deliver up all! only hasten!—hasten!" he exclaimed in a hoarse voice.

CHAPTER VI.

THE house of Petronius on the Carinæ had, fortunately, escaped destruction by the flames, inasmuch as it was enclosed by a garden on three sides, while in front was the small Cecilian Forum. Thither he was now borne after leaving Cæsar. Most of the Augustians had had the misfortune to lose costly houses loaded with art treasures, and immense riches, in the conflagration. The oft-repeated expression among the Augustians, that Petronius was the "firstborn of Fortune," would seem to be justified by his recent lucky escape, coupled with the ever-increasing favor of Cæsar. But this "child of Fortune" had now reason to

deplore his mother's inconstancy, or to liken her to Chronos who devoured his own offspring.

"If," thought he, "my house, together with my gems, Etruscan vases, Alexandrian glass, and Corinthian bronzes, had been destroyed, my offense might have been pardoned. By Pollux! To think that I could have been pretorian prefect just now had I so willed! I would have fixed the guilt on the real incendiary, Tigellinus, caused him to don the 'tunic of distress,' and given him up to the people. I would befriend the Christians and have Rome rebuilt. Would not that have been the dawn of a brighter epoch for honest men? Even for the sake of Vinicius alone I ought to have held the office. Had I found the work too much for me I could have placed him in my stead, and Nero would have raised no objection. Then Vinicius could have converted the pretorians, and even Cæsar himself; what harm could that do. Fancy Nero pious! Nero good and merciful!—what an amusing spectacle."

In his unconcern, he laughed at the thought. But soon his thoughts began to flow in a different channel. He recalled the time in Antium when Paul of Tarsus discoursed with him thus; "Ye say we are enemies of life, O Petronius; but tell me this: if Cæsar were a Christian, and lived according to our teaching, would not life be happier and safer?"

As he dwelt upon those words, he continued: "By Castor! Paul will always make as many new Christians as will supply the number of those they murder; no matter how many that be; for his teaching is true, unless the basis of everything is evil. But it seems that such will be the case soon. In my time I have learned much, but I did not learn how to be villain enough; and so, it will be necessary to open a vein; it was bound to come to that sooner or later. I grieve for Eunice and my Myrrhene vase; but I have freed Eunice, and my vase I will take with me. Ahenobarbus shall not have it at all events! I grieve too for Vinicius. I am ready to die, although life has not bored me so much lately, as formerly. The world itself is very beautiful, but people are vile; and so for most things life is not worth a regret, and one who knew how to live, should also know how to die. I was not so fettered as people imagined, though I am an Augustian. Perhaps they imagine that just now my knees shake with fear, and my hair stands up with affright. I will bathe in violet water when

I arrive at my house, and let Eunice herself anoint me ; we will then partake of refreshment, and listen meanwhile to the singing of that hymn to Apollo which Anthemios composed. I once considered it unnecessary to give a thought to death, for he thinks sufficiently of us. How strange it would be if there really were Elysian fields, and shades of departed people there ! Eunice would follow me soon, and we should roam together over those meadows of asphodel, and find a better society there than these clowns and charlatans ; a crowd without taste, too vulgar to polish ! Scores of Arbiters *Elegantiarum* could not convert into decency these Trimalchions. By Persephone ! I have had a sufficiency ! ”

It was with a feeling of astonishment that he perceived he had drifted farther and farther away from his former companions. He had always felt for them a certain contempt, but lately that feeling had become much more pronounced.

The consideration of his position now occupied him. His keen insight showed him that the danger which threatened him was not immediate. The very words Nero had used, regarding friendship and forgiveness, would compel him to seek a further excuse, and that would give Petronius some little time. “ He will celebrate the games first,” thought Petronius, “ before he will think of me. Therefore it is not worth the trouble of making any change in my life at present. The peril surrounding Vinicius is more imminent.”

His thoughts, after this, were devoted solely to planning some means of saving Vinicius. He urged on the four stalwart Bithynians, who carried his litter through the ashes and ruins which yet filled the *Carinæ*. He luckily found Vinicius at his house, where he had made his home since the destruction of his own during the fire.

“ Hast thou seen Lygia to-day ? ” said he.

“ I have but lately left her.”

“ Listen to what I say to thee, and waste no time in questioning. Cæsar has determined to blame the Christians for the destruction of Rome. They may be taken at any minute, and then persecution and torture await them. Flee with Lygia immediately, across the Alps, or even to Africa. Go at once ; for it is nearer to the Trans-Tiber from the Palatine than from here.”

Vinicius was too good a soldier to waste time in idle ques-

tions. A frown darkened his brow as he listened, and his face became resolute and fearless.

"I go," he said.

"One other word. Take with thee a few of thy Christian slaves, take gold and arms, and, if necessary, take her by force!"

Vinicius had already reached the door of the atrium.

"Send a messenger to me with tidings," Petronius called after him.

When he was alone, Petronius commenced to pace up and down the atrium, thinking over recent events. It was an unfortunate occurrence that Linus with Lygia had returned to their former dwelling, which, with the most part of the Trans-Tiber, had escaped the fire. It would be an easier matter to find them; but Petronius hoped that their whereabouts was not known among the dwellers of the Palatine, and that Vinicius would reach her before pretorians could arrive. He calculated, moreover, that Tigellinus in his efforts to capture as many Christians at one time as he possibly could, would scatter his pretorians all over Rome. "If no more than ten are sent for Lygia," thought he, "that Lygian will easily dispose of them, even if Vinicius be not there in time." He was comforted by the thought, although he knew that resistance to the pretorians was tantamount to war with Cæsar; and if Vinicius were successful enough to escape, Nero's vengeance would then be turned upon himself. Far from being much concerned over that, he was delighted at the prospect of thwarting Nero's schemes, together with those of Tigellinus. He knew in his defense of the Christians he could depend on the zealous aid of his slaves, for Paul of Tarsus had converted many during the stay in Antium.

The current of his thoughts was now changed by the entrance of Eunice. He no longer remembered Cæsar, and the loss of his favor, the dangers threatening Lygia, Vinicius and the Christians, as he gazed on her transcendent beauty.

She had attired herself in a robe of violet gauze, through whose transparent folds her beautiful form appeared like some goddess. She blushed with delight before his admiring gaze.

"What hast thou to say to me, Charis?" he asked, stretching out a detaining hand.

"Anthemios with his singers has arrived. Dost thou wish to hear him?"

"Yes, let him remain and sing to us during dinner the hymn he has composed to Apollo. By the Paphian groves! but thou remindest me of Aphrodite clothed in a fleecy cloud, when I see thee in that gauze."

"O lord!"

"Come hither, Eunice, embrace me, and give me thy lips. Dost thou love me?"

"More than I should have loved Zeus." She placed her rosy lips to his, overcome with happiness.

Presently Petronius asked,—

"What if we should have to part?"

"How, lord?" she asked, a look of alarm in her eyes.

"Do not be afraid. It may be that I shall have to go a long journey."

"Let me go with thee"—

Petronius turned the conversation quickly, saying,—

"Tell me, are asphodels growing among the grass in the garden?"

"The cypresses and the grass are withered from the fire, and the leaves are fallen from the myrtles. The garden seems dead."

"So does all Rome, and soon it will become an immense burial ground. Dost know that there is an edict against the Christians, and thousands will be destroyed in the persecution which will follow?"

"Why should the Christians be punished, lord? They are peaceful and righteous."

"That is the reason."

"Then let us go away to the sea. Thy beautiful eyes do not like to behold blood."

"But now I must bathe. Come and anoint my arms. By the girdle of Kypris! thou hast never looked so beautiful. I will have a bath made for thee like a seashell where thou wilt appear like some radiant pearl. Come, golden-haired one!"

He left the atrium, and later on, both were resting before a table on which was spread a service of gold. They were garlanded with wreaths of roses, and were served with wine in ivy-wreathed goblets, by Cupids, whilst they listened to the hymn to Apollo, sung to the accompaniment of harps. What to them was all the ruin about them? They were happy in the love that had made their lives like a delight-

ful dream. Before the end of the hymn, however, the chief of the atrium entered in alarm.

"Lord," said he, in a quivering voice, "a centurion, accompanied by pretorians, stands without. He asks to see thee at command of Cæsar."

The music ceased; all present were filled with fear; for pretorians did not usually carry Cæsar's messages to his friends. Petronius, however, showed no alarm, but said in a petulant manner,—

"Cannot they let me dine in peace." Then, addressing the chief of the atrium, he commanded, "Let him enter."

He disappeared, and directly after, the centurion Afer entered. He was armed and wore his iron helmet.

"Noble lord," said he, "I bring thee a letter from Cæsar."

Petronius took it lazily, and glancing his eye over the tablet, passed it calmly to Eunice."

"He invites me to listen to the reading of a new book of the Troyad, which he will give this evening."

"I have no further orders," said the centurion.

"There is no answer. But stay, centurion, thou mightst remain with us a little while and drink a goblet of wine."

"Thanks! noble lord. I will gladly drink thy health in a goblet of wine, but I am on duty and may not rest."

"Why was the letter not delivered by a slave?"

"That I know not, lord. I had other duty in this direction."

"Wert thou sent against the Christians?"

"Yes, lord."

"When did the search commence?"

"Before midday some pretorians were sent to the Trans-Tiber." Saying which he shook a little of the wine in honor of Mars, and emptied the goblet.

"May the gods grant thy desire, lord."

"Take the goblet also," said Petronius. He signed to Anthemios to finish the hymn and resumed his reflections.

"Nero thinks to play with us now, but I see through his little game. He sought to frighten me by sending a centurion; in the evening they will ask him if I showed any fear. But no! Thou shalt not get too much amusement, thou cruel and false one! I know that thou hast determined on my death, but if thou hast calculated on my showing fear and supplication thou art doomed to disappointment.

"Lord," exclaimed Eunice, "Cæsar writes, 'Come if thou hast the wish.' Wilt thou go?"

"Since my health can stand even his verses," replied Petronius, "I shall go; particularly, as Vinicius is not able to do so."

After dinner, he took his accustomed walk, then he commanded his slaves to dress his hair and arrange his robes, after which, looking like some beautiful god he departed for the Palatine.

The evening was a delightful one, and the hour was late. A brilliant moon lit up the streets so well that the lampadarii had no need for their torches. Crowds of people, garlanded with honeysuckle and ivy, and carrying myrtle and laurel from the palace gardens, were making their way among the ruins. Some were singing of the "divine night" and love; some were too drunk to sing; others were dancing in the moonlight; and all were happy with the hope of having plenty of grain and great games. At the repeated demands of the slaves to "make way for the noble Petronius," the throng divided, and shouted in praise of their favorite. Petronius was wondering how it was he had had no message from Vinicius. Epicurean and egotist though he was, his recent conversations with Paul of Tarsus and Vinicius and his further knowledge of the Christians had unconsciously changed the general tenor of his ideas. He had begun to take an interest in the affairs of others. Besides this, he was much attached to Vinicius as he had been to his sister, the mother of Vinicius, in childhood. He hoped that Vinicius had been able to remove Lygia before the arrival of the pretorians, or at least to have rescued her from them. Still he would have liked to be sure, in order to be better able to answer the questions he knew would be put to him.

Alighting from his litter at the house of Tiberius, he entered the atrium, which was already crowded with Augustians. His previous friends were puzzled how to meet him, most of them being afraid of showing a too friendly spirit. But he passed through the crowd as unmoved and free as though he possessed power over all. His easy bearing alarmed some who feared their coldness had been premature. But Cæsar did not acknowledge his obeisance, feigning not to see him, and to be deep in conversation. Tigellinus, however, advanced toward him, saying,—

"A good evening to thee Arbiter Elegantiarum! Sayst thou still that the Christians did not burn Rome?"

Petronius clapped Tigellinus on the back patronizingly as he would a freedman, and replied, shrugging his shoulders,

"Thou knowest what to think about that as well as I do."

"I would not venture to rival thy wisdom."

"Quite rightly, too! for then thou wouldst be expected to make a sensible remark, instead of a senseless exclamation, when Cæsar reads to us a new book of the *Troyad*."

Tigellinus only bit his lips. He was not too well pleased at the reading of the new book, because he was well aware that Petronius would completely outshine him in that field. And so it proved, for involuntarily Nero turned his eyes in the direction of Petronius, to gather his opinion from the expression of his face. Petronius listened attentively, and criticised adroitly, so that Cæsar felt that though others were liberal with their praises, Petronius alone was sincere in his expressions; that he alone understood poetry, and if he praised the verses, they were indeed worthy of praise. By degrees he drew him into discussion and when Petronius raised a doubt as to the aptness of a particular passage, he remarked,—

"In the last book thou wilt see why I used it."

"Ah!" mused Petronius, "he will put off my sentence until the last book is read."

Others who heard the remark, said mentally,—

"Woe is me! Petronius has time before him and may overcome Tigellinus yet." And many were the advances made to him. The evening ended however less promisingly, for as Petronius approached to take his leave of Cæsar, the latter suddenly turned to him with a malicious gleam in his eyes, and asked,

"Why is Vinicius not here?"

Petronius did not know if Lygia had been safely conveyed from the city or he would have replied, "He has gone with thy permission and married." But as he noticed the peculiar smile on Nero's face he answered,—

"He was not at home when thy invitation arrived, divinity."

"Tell Vinicius that I shall be happy to see him," said Nero, "and that he must not fail to see the games in which the Christians take part."

Petronius felt that these words referred particularly to Lygia, and his anxiety became very great. He urged on

his litter bearers more quickly even than in the morning, but it was not such an easy matter to advance. A throng more noisy and drunk than before had gathered before the house, and from a distance came shouts, which at first were undistinguishable, but which gradually settled into one fierce roar,—

“To the lions with the Christians!”

Courtiers in their costly litters were borne through the yelling mob. Fresh crowds gathered continually and swelled the cry. News of the seizure of Christians was quickly circulated, and over all the ruins, the hills and the gardens, throughout Rome rose that shout of ever-increasing rage,—

“To the lions with the Christians!”

“A herd!” thought Petronius, “worthy of such a Caesar!” He commenced to ponder on that society, which rested on brute force, such cruelty, crimes and profligacy as even barbarians could not have dreamed of. It surely could not endure! Rome governed the world, but was also its sore, and over her was already the shadow of death. The Augustians had often talked of this, but now Petronius saw it clearer than ever before. The queen city of the world, seemed to be reaching her end in a sort of mad, delirious dance. He saw too, that the Christians only had a true basis of life; but he thought also, that soon the Christians would be wiped away, and what would follow?

Still this wild dance would go on; and if Nero were removed, it would only be to make room for another Nero; for such a nation, and such a society wished no better. A new orgy would commence, fouler and more corrupt still. This could not endure always, however, and the city must inevitably sleep the sleep of exhaustion at last.

These thoughts produced an intense weariness, so that Petronius wondered if life were worth the living, in such uncertainty, in such a society, and without a purpose. Was not death as beautiful as sleep, and likewise winged?

At that instant the litter stopped before the door, which was immediately opened by the slave in waiting.

“Has the noble Vinicius returned?” asked Petronius.

“Yes, lord, at this instant,” answered the slave.

He has not succeeded, thought Petronius; and throwing his toga aside, he hastily entered the atrium. Vinicius was seated with his head buried in his hands, but he lifted it at

the sound of footsteps, showing a set white face with a feverish glare in the eyes.

"Wert thou too late?" inquired Petronius.

"Yes, she was seized before midday."

They were silent for awhile.

"Hast thou seen her?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the Mamertine prison."

Petronius shuddered, and looked questioninglly at Vinicius. He understood the glance and replied,

"No! They have not put her down in the Tullianum, nor the middle prison. I bribed the guard to let her have his room. Ursus is at the threshold watching over her."

"Why did he not defend her?"

"Fifty pretorians had been sent, and he was forbidden by Linus."

"And Linus?"

"He is dying, so they have not taken him."

"What dost thou purpose to do?"

"To save her, or perish with her. I too am a Christian."

The voice of Vinicius was calm, but he spoke so despairingly, that Petronius was shaken with intense pity.

"I understand," he said; "but how will thou attempt to save her?"

"I have paid the guards well, to save her from indignity, and to place no obstacles in the way of her escape."

"When may that be accomplished?"

"They said that they dared not surrender her to me just now, but when the prison becomes more crowded and the numbers of the prisoners confused they will do so. That is, however, a desperate measure. Thou art Cæsar's friend! He gave her to me himself! Go and speak with him, and save her and me!"

Petronius only replied by calling a slave, and bidding him bring two cloaks and swords, turned to Vinicius.

"We will speak on the road," he said. "Take these and let us go to the prison. Give a hundred thousand sester tia to the guards, twice or five times as much, to free Lygia now, or it will be too late."

"Let us go," said Vinicius.

Soon they were both on the way.

"Harken," said Petronius. "Let us not lose time. I am under Cæsar's displeasure, and my life hangs by a

thread, so I have now no influence over him. More than that, he would act contrary to my request. If that were not so, dost thou think I should advise thee to flee, or attempt to rescue Lygia? Moreover shouldst thou escape, Cæsar will vent his wrath on me. Never mind that, however. Get her from prison and flee; there is no other way. If this plan fails we must endeavor to find some other means. Lygia is not imprisoned merely for being a Christian, but Poppæa is visiting her anger against thee in this way. She has not forgotten how thou didst reject her, and she knows for whom. Moreover she has always hated Lygia, and tried to compass her death before, by accusing her of causing her own child's death by witchcraft. Poppæa is the moving spirit in this persecution against Lygia. This explains why Lygia was one of the first to be seized. She has been watched for a long time, or how would they have known where was the house of Linus? I know that this cuts thee to the soul, and takes from thee almost the last shred of hope, but I must tell thee, because if thou art not able to rescue her before they suspect thy purpose, there is no hope for either Lygia or thee."

"Yes; I understand!" said Vinicius.

As the hour was growing late the streets were almost deserted; but a drunken gladiator came reeling toward them, putting a stop to further conference just then. As he stumbled against Petronius he placed a hand on his shoulder, and shouted huskily,—

"To the lions with Christians."

"Mirmillon! take my advice and go quietly home," said Petronius, calmly.

"Shout with me," said the fellow seizing him by the arm, "or I'll break thy neck. Christians to the lions."

But this was too much for the arbiter. His ears had been deafened and his nerves tightened by such shouts, ever since he left the house of Cæsar; and now at sight of the gladiator's clenched fist above him his patience became exhausted.

"Friend, thou smellst of wine," said he, "and art in my way."

At this he drew the short sword he had brought with him, and thrust it to the hilt in the breast of the ruffian. Putting his arm through that of Vinicius, he proceeded,

"Cæsar said, 'Tell Vinicius from me not to fail to be present at the games with Christians.' Dost thou know

what that means? They wish to witness thy pain. Perhaps that is the reason why thou and I are not already imprisoned. Perhaps Acte might help thee; but is she able? Then the offer of thy lands in Sicily might perhaps procure the aid of Tigellinus. Try it."

"He may have all I possess," answered Vinicius. They soon arrived at the Forum, for the distance was not great. Already the night had begun to merge into the first pale streaks of dawn, and the castle walls were plainly visible. But just as they turned in the direction of the prison, Petronius suddenly stopped, saying,—

"We are too late! There are pretorians!"

In fact, a double line of them surrounded the prison; their helmets and javelins shone mistily in the grey light.

The face of Vinicius grew pallid. "Let us go on," he whispered.

Soon they stopped in front of them. Petronius who had an excellent memory knew many of the pretorians as well as their captains. Presently he recognized a leader of a cohort.

"How is this, Niger? have ye orders to guard the prison?" he asked.

"Yes, noble Petronius. The prefect feared there might be an attempt at rescue."

"Are ye commanded not to admit any one?" asked Vinicius.

"No; for their friends will visit the prisoners and in that way many more Christians will be taken."

"Then let me enter," he replied. Pressing the hand of Petronius, he said, "Speak to Acte and I will come for her answer."

"Yes, come," said Petronius.

Just then from beneath the ground and behind the massive prison walls singing was heard. At first, low and muffled, it swelled louder and clearer, until the whole prison resounded with the chorus. Voices of men, women, and children mingled in one triumphant hymn.

The pretorians gazed at each other in wonder, as they listened; and just then the first golden rays of morning lit up the sky.

CHAPTER VII.

THE cries, "Death to the Christians!" were heard in every part of the city. At the first moment not only did nobody doubt that they were the real cause of the calamity, but no one wished even to doubt since their punishment was to be at the same time a grand amusement for the people. Still an opinion was circulating that the catastrophe would not have assumed such dreadful proportions if not for the anger of the gods; for this reason in the temples "*piacula*," or purifying sacrifices were performed. By the advice of the Sibylline priests the senate ordained solemnities and public prayer to Vulcan, Ceres and Proserpina. Girls made offerings to Juno; a whole procession of them went to the seashore to get water and sprinkle with it the statue of the goddess. Married women prepared feasts to the gods* and night watches. All Rome purified itself from sin, made sacrifices and tried to be in peace with the immortals.

Meanwhile among the ruins new, broad streets were opened. Here and there foundations were laid for magnificent houses, palaces, and temples. But first of all they built with unusual haste an enormous wooden amphitheatre in which Christians were to die. Immediately after the consultation in the house of Tiberius orders were sent to consuls to furnish wild beasts. Tigellinus emptied the vivaria of all Italian cities, not excepting the very small ones. In Africa, at his command, gigantic hunts were organized, in which the entire populace of the cities had to take part. Tigers and elephants were brought from Asia,—hippopotami and crocodiles from the Nile, lions from the Atlas, wolves and bears from the Pyrenees, savage hounds from Hibernia, Molossian dogs from Epirus, bison, and the gigantic wild aurochs from Germany. As there was a large number of prisoners, the games therefore had to surpass in grandeur anything seen up to that time. Cæsar wished to drown in blood all memory of the fire, and make Rome intoxicated with it; therefore never had there been promise for a greater show of bloodshed.

* *Selisteria* and *Lecebisteria*.

The people helped guards and pretorians in hunting Christians. That was no difficult labor, for whole groups of them camped with the heathens in the midst of the gardens, and confessed their faith openly. When attacked they knelt, and while singing hymns let themselves be borne away without resistance. But their patience only increased the anger of the populace, who did not understand its origin, and considered it as rage and persistence in crime. Madness seized the persecutors. It happened that the mob wrested Christians from pretorians and tore them to pieces; women were dragged to prison by the hair; children's heads were dashed against stones. Thousands of people rushed, howling, night and day through the streets. Victims were found in ruins, in chimneys, in cellars. Before the prisons singing and dancing went on; at the light of the burning wood piles, around casks of wine they performed bacchanalian feasts. In the evening was heard with delight the bellowing of the mob, which was like thunder, and which sounded throughout the city. The prisons were overflowing with thousands of people; every day the mob and pretorians drove in new victims. There was no pity. It seemed that people had forgotten to speak and in their wild raging remembered only one shout: "Death to the Christians!" Wonderfully hot days came, and nights more stifling than ever before; even the air seemed to be filled with blood, madness and crime.

And that surpassing measure of cruelty was answered by an equal measure of desire for martyrdom. The confessors of Christ went willingly to death, or even sought death till they were restrained by the stern commands of their superiors. By the order of these superiors they began to assemble only outside the city, in excavations near the Appian Way and in vineyards belonging to patrician Christians, of whom so far none had been imprisoned. On the Palatine hill it was known perfectly that to the confessors of Christ belonged Flavius, Domitilla, Pomponia Græcina, Cornelius Padens, and Vinicius. Cæsar himself, however, feared that the mob would not believe that such people had burned Rome and since it was important first of all to convince the mob, punishment and vengeance were deferred till a future time. Some were of the opinion that those patricians were saved by the influence of Acte. But this opinion was erroneous. Petronius after parting with Vinicius, turned to Acte, to ask her to gain assistance for Lygia,

but she could only give him her tears, for she lived in oblivion and suffering, and was tolerated only in so far as she hid herself from Poppæa and Cæsar.

But she had visited Lygia in prison, she had carried her clothing and food, and mainly had saved her from insult on the part of the prison-guards, who, besides, were bribed already. And meanwhile Petronius, who was unable to forget that, had it not been for his plan of taking Lygia away from Aulus, she would probably not be now in prison, and wishing to win the game against Tigellinus spared neither time nor efforts. In the time of a few days he saw Seneca, Domitius Afer, Crispinilla, through whom he wished to reach Poppæa,—also Terpnos, Diodorus and the beautiful Pythagoras, and finally Aliturus and Paris, to whom Cæsar usually refused nothing. With the help of Chrysothemis, who was at this time the mistress of Vatinius, he tried even to gain his aid, not sparing in this case, and in others, promises and money.

But all these efforts were fruitless. Seneca, being uncertain himself of the morrow, started to explain to him that the Christians, even if they had not burned Rome, ought to be exterminated just the same for the good of the city,—in a word, he justified the coming bloodshed for political reasons. Terpnos and Diodorus took the money but did nothing for it in return. Vatinius reported to Cæsar that an attempt was made to bribe him; and only Aliturus alone, who at first was hostile to the Christians, but took pity on them now—dared to mention to Cæsar the imprisoned maiden and to beg for her safety; but he obtained nothing, except the answer,—

“Dost thou think that I have a soul inferior to that of Brutus, who spared not his own sons for the sake of Rome?”

When Aliturus repeated this answer to Petronius, he said,—

“Since Nero has compared himself to Brutus, there is certainly no salvation!”

But he had pity on Vinicius and he was afraid he might attempt to take his own life. “Now,” said Petronius to himself, “he is upheld by the efforts which he makes to save her, by the sight of her, and by his own sufferings, but when all the means fail and the last ray of hope is extinguished—by Castor! he will not survive her, he will throw himself on his sword.” Petronius understood how to die

better than he could understand how to love and suffer like Vinicius. And meanwhile Vinicius did all that he could think of to save Lygia. He visited Augustians,—he, who was once so proud, now begged their assistance. Through Vitellius he offered Tigellinus all his Sicilian estates, and whatever else he should wish to ask; but Tigellinus, not wishing apparently to offend the Augusta, refused. To go to Cæsar himself, embrace his knees and implore, would lead to nothing. Vinicius wished to do even this, but Petronius hearing of his intentions, inquired,

“And what if he will refuse thee, or answer with a jest or a shameless threat, what wouldst thou do?”

The features of Vinicius contracted with pain and rage, and from his fixed jaws a gritting sound was heard.

“Yes,” said Petronius—“therefore I advise thee against this! Thou wouldst close all paths of rescue.”

But Vinicius restrained himself, and passing his hand over his forehead, which was covered with cold sweat, he said,—

“No! no! I am a Christian.”

“But thou wilt forget this as thou didst a moment before. Thou hast the right to ruin thyself, but not her. Remember the suffering of the daughter of Sejanus before her death.”

And speaking thus Petronius was not sincere at all, since he was concerned more for Vinicius than for Lygia. Still he knew that in no way could he restrain him from a dangerous step except by telling him that he would bring inexorable destruction to Lygia. But he was right, for on the Palatine hill they had counted on the visit of the young tribune and had taken necessary precautions.

But the suffering of Vinicius surpassed all that a human being could endure. From the very moment that Lygia was imprisoned and the glory of coming martyrdom had fallen on her, not only did he love her more, but he began simply to give her in his soul almost religious honor, as a super-human being. And now, at the thought that he must lose this being, so dear and holy to him, that besides death torments might be inflicted on her more terrible than death itself, the blood stiffened in his veins. His soul was turned into one groan, his thoughts were confused. At times it seemed to him that his skull was on fire, and that it would either be burned, or burst. He ceased to understand what was going on around him; he ceased to understand why

Christ, the Merciful, the Divine, does not come with aid to His adherents; why the darkened walls of the Palatine court did not sink through the earth, and with them Nero, the Augustians, the pretorian camp and all that city of crime. He thought that it could not and should not be otherwise, and all that his eyes saw and what his soul suffered and the heart was breaking, was a dream. But the roaring of the wild beasts informed him that it was reality; the sound of the axes beneath which rose the arena told him that it was reality, and this very same conviction was confirmed by the howling of the populace and the overfilled prisons. Then his faith in Christ was shaken, and that was a new torture, the most dreadful of all perhaps. And at the same time Petronius said to him,—

“Remember what the daughter of Sejanus endured before death!”

CHAPTER VIII.

EVERYTHING failed. Vinicius lowered himself to the degree of seeking help from freedmen and slave women of Cæsar and Poppæa; he paid well for their lying promises, and by rich gifts won their good will. He found the first husband of Poppæa, Rufius Crispinus, and obtained from him a letter; presented his villa in Antium to the son of Poppæa by her first marriage, but thereby only angered Cæsar, who hated his stepson. By a special courier he sent letters to the second husband of Poppæa, to Otho, in Spain, to whom he promised all his property and himself; and then only noticed that he was the plaything of people, and that if he could pretend indifference to the fate of Lygia, he would have freed her sooner.

Petronius saw this, too. Meanwhile the days were fleeting. The amphitheatres were finished. Tickets for admission to the *ludus matutinus* were being distributed. But this time the morning games, on account of the immense number of victims, were to continue for days, weeks, and months. They did not know where to keep the Christians. The prisons were crammed, and fever was raging in them. “Puticuli,” *i. e.*, common pits in which slaves were kept, also began to be overfilled. There was danger of a pestilence spreading through the city,—hence it was necessary to make haste.

All this news reached Vinicius, extinguishing in him the last rays of hope. While there was time he could cherish the hope that he might yet do something; but now there was little time left. The spectacles were soon to begin; Lygia might any day find herself in the "cuniculum," from which there was but one exit,—to the arena. Not knowing where fate and the cruelty of violence might throw her, he went from circus to circus, bribing the watchmen and the "bestiari," asking them for favors which they were unable to grant. At times he thought that he was exerting himself only to make her death less terrible, and then he felt as if his skull was filled with burning coals.

He did not hope to outlive her, and decided to perish with her, but at the same time he understood that sorrow might dry in him the last drops of life even before the fatal moment arrived. His friends, and among them Petronius, also thought that any day might open the kingdom of shadows before him. The face of Vinicius turned as black as the waxen masks kept in *lararia*. An expression of perplexity was in his frigid features, looking as if he could not understand what happened, or what was going to happen. When some one spoke to him, he unconsciously raised his hand, and, pressing his temples with the palms of his hands, looked at the speaker with frightened and searching gaze. The nights he and Ursus passed at the door of the dungeon where Lygia was kept; and when she commanded him to go and take a rest, he returned to Petronius and paced in the atrium till morning. The slaves often found him kneeling, and with uplifted hands, or lying on the ground face downward. He prayed to Christ,—that was his last hope. Everything had failed him. Only a miracle could save Lygia, and Vinicius beat the ground with his forehead and prayed for a miracle.

But there was enough consciousness left in him to understand that the prayer of Peter had greater weight than his own. Peter promised him Lygia, Peter baptized him, Peter himself wrought miracles; so let him now help and save him.

Thus once on a night he went to seek the Apostle. The Christians—there were few left of them now—avoided each other more carefully, lest some weak-spirited among them might, wittingly or unwittingly, betray them. Amid the general confusion and havoc, Vinicius, who was dominated by the one thought of snatching Lygia from the

dungeon, lost sight of the Apostle, so that since his baptism he only saw him once, and that was before the persecution began. At the hut of the quarryman, whither Vinicius went for information, he was told that there was going to be that day a meeting of the Christians beyond the Porta Salaria, in the vineyard of Cornelius Pudens. The quarryman undertook to escort Vinicius to the place, and assured him that they would meet Peter there.

As soon as it grew dark they left the hut, passed the city gates, and along the ravines overgrown with reeds they walked until they reached the vineyard which was straggling in a broad, wild waste. The meeting was held in a shed, used for pressing grapes. On the threshold Vinicius heard the whispered prayer, and within he saw by the dim light of lamp a few dozen people, kneeling and enwrapped in prayer. Some one was reading a kind of litany, and a chorus of male and female voices repeated every little while, "Christ have mercy on us!" Deep, piercing, mournful grief quivered in those voices.

Peter was there. He stood kneeling in front of the others, before a wooden crucifix, fastened to the wall of the shed, and prayed. Vinicius recognized his white hair and uplifted hands. The first thought of the young patrician was to force a passage through the crowd, throw himself at the feet of the Apostle, and call out, Save us! but whether it was the solemnity of the prayer, or weakness that made his knees bend, Vinicius clasped his hands, and began to groan and repeat: "Christ, have mercy!" If he had full possession of his faculties he would have understood that he was not the only one who brought there grief, alarm and downcast heart. In this assembly there was not a soul who had not lost some dear one; and when the principal and most important confessors were in prison already; when every moment new tidings were brought of the humiliation and tortures the imprisoned were subjected to; when the extent of the misfortunes had exceeded all apprehensions, where there were but a handful of Christians left, —there was not one heart which was not hesitating in its faith, which did not doubtfully ask: Where is Christ? why does He permit evil to be mightier than God? But meanwhile they implored in despair for His mercy, for in each heart there still smoldered a spark of faith that He would come, wipe out the infamy, hurl Nero into the abyss, and rule supreme in the world. The Christians still looked to

Him for succor, listened to Him, and prayed to Him. Vini-
cius went into ecstasy every time he repeated, "Christ have
mercy on us." They called on him from the depth of their
grief; Peter called on him; and any moment the heavens
may be rent, the earth tremble, and He come way down
in infinite splendor, stars at His feet, merciful but stern.
He will raise up the faithful, and command the abyss to
swallow their persecutors.

Vinicius covered his face with his hands, and bowed to
the ground. Suddenly all was quiet around him, as if fear
deprived the assembly of speech. It seemed to him that
the moment of a miracle was at hand. He thought that if
he raised his head, he would see a blinding light, and hear
a voice which would cause human hearts to tremble.

But the silence continued, and was interrupted only by the
sobbing of women. Vinicius rose and with wondering eyes
looked around. In the shed, instead of the heavenly light,
the lamp-lights flickered, and the rays of the moon, entering
through an opening in the roof, cast a silver light on the
kneeling crowd, who silently looked on the crucifix. There
were tears in the eyes of everybody, some were sobbing,
and from without came the cautious whistles of the watch-
men. Peter turned to the crowd and said:

"Children, raise your hearts to the Redeemer, and offer
Him your tears."

And he remained silent. Presently a female voice was
heard, full of pain and supplication.

"I am a widow; I had a son who supported me. Give
him back, O Lord!"

Peter, old and exhausted, stood before the kneeling
crowd. He seemed the personification of weakness.
Another voice was heard complaining:

"The executioners have dishonored my daughter, and
Christ permitted it!" Then came a third voice:

"I am left alone with my children; when I am taken
away, who will give them bread and water?"

"Linus was spared at first; but now they have put him
to torture, O Lord!"

"When we return home, the pretorians will seize us.
We know not where to hide."

"Woe to us! Who will protect us?"

Thus in the silence of the night complaints were coming
one after the other. The old fisherman closed his eyes, and
shook his white head over this sea of human misery. Si-

lence reigned again, only the whistle of the watchmen was heard. Vinicius sprang to his feet, intending to go over to where the Apostle stood and ask him for help, but he suddenly perceived a chasm before him, and his feet weakened under him. What if the Apostle recognize his own weakness, if he will only confirm that the Roman Cæsar is mightier than Jesus of Nazareth? His hair stood on end from terror; he felt that into that chasm would be hurled not only his hopes, but with them he himself, his Lygia, his love for Christ, his faith, and all that made up his life. Only death would remain, and night,—a shoreless sea.

Peter began to speak in a voice so low that he could hardly be heard,—

“My children; on Golgotha I saw Christ nailed to the cross. I heard the blows of the hammer, saw the cross raised on high so that the people might see the death of the Son of Man. I saw his sides pierced, and I saw him die. And then, returning from the cross, I cried in bitterness, as ye cry to-day: ‘Woe! Woe! O Lord, Thou art God,—why hast Thou permitted this? Why hast Thou permitted death to touch Thee: why hast Thou stung the hearts of those that believed that Thy kingdom would come?’ And He, our Lord, and our God, on the third day rose from the dead, and was among us till He entered His kingdom in glory.

“And we, seeing our faith, grew stronger in heart, and since that time we are sowing His seed.”

Then turning to the place whence the first complaint came, he said in a resolute voice,—

“Why do ye complain? God gave Himself to torture and death, and ye wish Him to shield you from them? Ye have little faith; have ye not understood his teaching? Has He promised ye an earthly life only? He comes to ye and says: ‘Follow in my path.’ He raises ye to himself, and ye hold fast to this earth and cry, ‘Lord save us!’ I am a grain of sand before God, but before ye I am His apostle and vicegerent, and speak in the name of Christ: Not death is before you, but life; not tortures, but eternal felicity; not tears and moans, but rejoicing; not bondage, but kingly rule! I, the apostle of God, say to thee, widow: thy son will not die, but will rise gloriously into eternal life, and thou wilt rejoin him! To thee, father, whose innocent daughter has been dishonored by the executioners, I promise that thou wilt find her whiter than the

lilies of Hebron. To all ye who are unfortunate, forsaken, and in every way have suffered; and to you who must die,—I declare in the name of Christ that ye will wake as from a dream to a happy life. In the name of Christ, let your eyes be opened, and let your hearts be inflamed.”

These words breathed a new life into the Christians, a shudder ran through them. Before them was no longer a bent and decrepit figure, but a giant who raised their souls from the dust.

“Amen!” exclaimed several voices.

There was fire in the eyes of the Apostle. He now looked grand, powerful and holy. They all bowed before him, and when silence was restored, he continued,—

“Sow in tears that ye may reap in joy. Why do ye fear the power of evil? The Lord, who is dwelling within you is above the earth, above Rome. The stones may be wet with your tears, the sand may be steeped in your blood, the pits may be filled with your bodies, but I tell ye that ye are the conquerors. God will destroy this city of crime, persecution and pride, and ye are His soldiers! And if He redeemed the world with His blood, why will ye not redeem this nest of infamy with your blood? This He commands through my lips.”

He stood motionless, his eyes raised to heaven. The Christians felt that he sees something which their mortal eyes could not see. His face changed and was lighted up with an uncommon serenity.

“Thou art here, O Lord, and dost show Thy ways to me. In this city of Satan, not in Jerusalem, wilt Thou place Thy throne? Here, upon these tears and this blood wilt Thou build Thy church? Here, where now rules Nero, will Thy eternal reign commence? O Lord! O Lord! Thou art pouring the fountain of strength on the weak, and commandest me to feed Thy lambs to the end of the world. Oh, be Thou praised! Thou, and Thy decrees by which Thou commandest us to conquer! Hosanna! Hosanna!”

Those who were alarmed rose, those who doubted were overfilled with faith. “Hosanna” and “Pro Christo” were heard from all sides. Heat-lightning lighted up the interior of the shed and the pale faces of the crowd.

Peter, absorbed in a vision, prayed for a long time, then he turned his inspired face to the crowd, and said:

“As God has conquered your doubt, so go ye forth, and conquer in His name!”

He then blessed them with the cross,—

“And now I bless ye, my children, and consecrate ye to torture, to death, to eternity!”

The Christians surrounded him and cried:

“We are ready, but do thou guard thyself, for thou art the vicegerent of Christ!” They kissed his garment, and he blessed them with the sign of the cross, as a father blesses his children whom he sends on a long journey.

Every one hurried home, and thence to the prisons and arenas. In thought they had already parted from the earth, and were making their flight to heaven. With Nereus and Pudens, the Apostle went along a narrow path to his house. But Vinicius followed him, and when they reached the cottage of Nereus, he threw himself at the feet of the Apostle, who recognized him, and asked:

“What dost thou wish, my son?”

But Vinicius, after what he had heard in the shed, dared not ask for interference; but, embracing his feet, he wept and silently implored.

“I know,” said Peter; “they have taken the girl whom thou lovest. Pray for her.”

“Lord,” moaned Vinicius, “I am a wretched worm; but thou didst know Christ. Implore Him to save her.”

He knew the power of the Apostle; knew that he alone could return her to him.

Peter was moved. He remembered that Lygia had similarly implored pity of him.

“My dear son,” said he, “I will pray for her, but remember what I said to those of little faith,—that God himself had gone through similar torments; and remember that after this life there is an eternity,”—

“I know; I have heard!” answered Vinicius, imbibing the air with his pale lips; “but see, lord, I cannot! If blood must be spilt, implore Christ to take mine,—I am a soldier. Let Him double, let Him treble the tortures,—I can bear them! But let Him save her! She is a child yet, master, and He is more powerful than Cæsar,—I believe more powerful! Thou didst love her thyself. Thou hast blessed us. She is an innocent child” —

Again he sank to the ground, pressed his face to Peter’s knees, and kept repeating,—

“Thou didst know Christ! Thou didst! He will hear thee! Pray for her!”

Peter closed his eyes and fervently prayed.

Lightning shot across the sky. By its light Vinicius watched the sentence that he expected from the lips of Peter,—of death or of life. The chirping of birds was heard in the vineyard, and the distant sound of tread-mills near the Via Salaria.

"Vinicius," finally said the Apostle, "hast thou faith?"

"Lord, would I have come hither if I did not have faith?"

"Then have faith to the end, for faith moves mountains. Though thou wert to see that maiden under the sword of the executioner, or in the jaws of a lion, believe that Christ can save her. Believe, and pray to Him, and I will pray with thee."

Then raising his face to heaven, he said loudly:

"Merciful Christ, look on this aching heart and console it! Merciful Christ, Thou hast implored the Father to take the bitter cup from Thy mouth, turn it now from the lips of Thy servant! Amen!"

"O Christ! I am Thine; take me instead of her!" exclaimed Vinicius.

The sky was growing pale in the east.

CHAPTER IX.

WITH a feeling of renewed hope Vinicius, on leaving the Apostle, betook himself to the prison. His soul was still filled with despair and terror, but he stifled his feelings. He could not bring himself to believe that the vicegerent of God should fail in his intercession, or that his prayer should have no effect. He could neither bring himself to hope, nor yet to doubt. "I will believe in His mercy," he said to himself, "even though I should see her in the jaws of a lion." This thought, though his soul was deeply stirred, and cold drops of perspiration showed themselves on his forehead, strengthened his belief. He even began to feel that faith could move mountains, as the strength within him, which he had never felt before, became apparent to him. It seemed that he could do things now that were impossible to him but the day before. He felt at times that the danger had passed. He recalled that night, and that holy face uplifted to heaven in prayer, whenever he felt a doubt creeping into his perturbed soul. "No, Christ will

not deny His first disciple and the pastor of His flock! Christ will not refuse him! I will not doubt!" Saying which he hastened toward the prison as a herald of good tidings.

There something unexpected awaited him. He was known to all the guards at the prison who generally placed no difficulty in his way. Now, however, the line did not open to him, but a centurion approaching, said,—

"Pardon, noble tribune, to-day we have a command not to admit any one."

"A command?" asked Vinicius, growing pale.

"Yes, lord," said the soldier, not without a show of pity, "it is Cæsar's command. There are many sick in the prison, and it is feared that visitors might spread infection throughout the city."

"Is the order for to-day only?"

"The guards change at noon."

Vinicius remained silent, removing from his head the pileolus which seemed to him now as though it were lead.

Approaching him the soldier said in a low voice,—*"Fear not, lord, the guard and Ursus watch over her."* Saying this he drew on the flag stone with his long Gallic sword, the outline of a fish.

"And thou a pretorian?" asked Vinicius, looking at him sharply.

"Till I am placed there," as he pointed to the prison.

"I, too, worship Christ," said Vinicius.

"His name be praised! I cannot admit thee to the prison, but I will carry a letter from thee to the guard."

"Thank thee, brother," as he pressed the soldier's hand, and turned away. His speech brought consolation to the heart of Vinicius. His pileolus no longer weighed upon him. He regarded with awakening hope the sun as it rose above the prison walls. Halting after a while he said,—

"I have not seen her to-day, O Lord, but I believe in Thy mercy."

He found Petronius at the house. Though not long returned he had taken his bath and anointed himself before going to sleep.

"I have news for thee," said he, "I was with Tullius Senecio to-day, who was also visited by Cæsar. I know not why the Augusta brought little Rufius with her, if not to soften Cæsar's heart. The child fell asleep during the reading, seeing which, Ahenobarbus threw a goblet at his

stepson, dangerously wounding him. Poppæa fainted. 'I have enough of this blood!' cried Cæsar, which, as thou knowest, is equivalent to death."

"God's punishment was hanging over the Augusta," said Vinicius; "but why tell me this?"

"Because Poppæa's anger was directed against thee and Lygia; her own misfortune may now occupy her solely, and render her more easily influenced. I will talk with her this evening."

"I thank thee for the good news thou gavest me."

"But thou needst to bathe and rest. Thy lips are blue, and thou art reduced to a mere shadow."

"Have they announced the time of the first 'ludus matutinus'?" asked Vinicius.

"In ten days. But other prisons will come first. We profit by the delay. All is not yet lost."

He did not believe this, however, for he knew there was no chance of rescue for Lygia. In pity he refrained from acquainting Vinicius with what he had heard at Senecio's, namely, the decision that Cæsar and Tigellinus had arrived at of reserving to themselves and their friends the most beautiful of the Christian maidens, to defile before torturing, the pretorians and beast-keepers to have the others on the day of the games.

He knew Vinicius would not survive Lygia, so he purposely held out to him what hope he might, first, because of his sympathy for him, and second, he wished, should Vinicius have to die, that he might look beautiful at his death, instead of showing a face distorted from pain and long watching.

"To-day I will plead with the Augusta something like this," said Petronius; "'Save Lygia for Vinicius, and I will save Rufius for thee.' A word spoken to Ahenobarbus in season may save or ruin. At all events we will gain time."

Vinicius thanked him.

"I want to see thee eat and sleep. In the greatest difficulties Odysseus kept these in mind. Thou hast spent the night in prison, of course?"

"No; there is an order admitting no one. Find out for me, Petronius, if such order is for to-day only, or till the games take place."

"I will find out this evening and let thee know to-morrow morning. Now I must sleep, and do thou also."

Vinicius went to the library where he wrote a letter to

Lygia, which he took himself to the Christian centurion. After a while the centurion returned with a greeting from Lygia, who promised her answer that day.

Instead of returning home Vinicius seated himself on a stone and waited for the letter. The sun was high in the heavens, and crowds of people thronged to the Forum when Vinicius, made drowsy by the heat, and yielding to his own excessive weariness, at last began to close his eyes. He was lulled to sleep by the monotonous cries of boys playing *mora*, and the measured tread of the guards.

In the dreams that came to him he thought he was carrying Lygia in his arms at night through a strange vineyard, Pomponia lighting the way with a torch. A voice like that of Petronius called to him to "Turn back!" Without heeding the warning he followed Pomponia till they arrived at a cottage, at the door of which stood Peter. "We come from the arena, lord," said he, "but Lygia sleeps, and we cannot wake her; wake her thou." "Christ himself will come to wake her," answered Peter.

Then the picture changed, and he saw Nero, and Poppæa with little Rufius in her arms, with Petronius washing the bleeding head of the child. Tigellinus was sprinkling ashes on tables whereon stood costly dishes. Vitellius was devouring the dishes, while a great many other Augustians were seated at the feast. He himself rested near Lygia. Between the tables stalked lions with manes dripping blood. Lygia beseeched him to take her from the place, but an awful weakness came over him so that he was unable even to move. At last all these visions dissolved into perfect darkness.

He was roused from sleep at last by the shouts that fell upon his ear. Rubbing his eyes he saw people swarming the streets. Two runners pushed the throng aside with their long staffs, crying out as they went to make way for a splendid litter borne by four Egyptian slaves.

A man clad in white robes, but whose face was partly hidden from observation by a roll of papyrus held close to his eyes, and which he seemed to be diligently perusing, sat inside.

"Make way for the noble Augustian!" cried the runners, but so thronged was the street that the litter was obliged to wait awhile. Putting down his roll of papyrus the Augustian cried,—

"Push those wretches aside! Make haste!" Seeing

Vinicius he drew back his head, raising the papyrus quickly to his face as he did so.

It was Chilo.

Vinicius thought he must be still dreaming.

The runners had now opened a way and were about to move when the young tribune approached the litter.

"A greeting to thee, O Chilo!" he said.

"Young man," said the Greek, with much pride, while endeavoring to assume an expression of calmness which he was far from feeling, "be greeted, but detain me not, for I am in haste to meet my friend, the noble Tigellinus."

Grasping the edge of the litter and looking him straight in the eye, Vinicius asked in a low voice,—

"Didst thou betray Lygia?"

"Colossus of Memnon!" cried Chilo, in fear. There was no threat in Vinicius's eyes, however, which caused the Greek's alarm to subside. At the thought of his own protection, and the unarmed condition of Vinicius, whose face, moreover, showed much emaciation, and whose body was bent by suffering, his insolence came back. Fixing his eyes on Vinicius he whispered in answer,—

"When I was dying of hunger thou didst give command to have me flogged."

Then both were silent.

"I wronged thee, Chilo," said Vinicius in a subdued tone of voice.

The Greek, snapping his fingers in contempt, said in a voice loud enough to be heard by all,—

"Friend, if thou hast a petition to present, I will see thee at my house on the Esquiline in the morning hour, when I receive guests and clients after my bath."

Waving his hand the Egyptians raised the litter, and the runners, brandishing their staffs, began to cry,—

"Make way for the litter of the noble Chilo Chilonides! make way, make way!"

CHAPTER X.

LYGIA, in a long letter hurriedly written, took farewell of Vinicius forever. It was known to her that no one is permitted to enter the prison and that she will see Vinicius only from the arena. She begged him to find out when

their turn would come and to be present at the games, as she wished to see him once more in her life. In her letter there was no evidence of fear. She wrote that she and the others are striving to the arena, where they will find liberation from imprisonment. Awaiting the arrival of Pomponia and Aulus, she begged that they too be present. Every word of hers was full of triumph, and that separation from earthly life in which all the prisoners lived; and at the same time an unshaken faith that all promises will be fulfilled beyond the grave. "Whether Christ will liberate me now or after death," wrote she, "He has promised me to thee by the lips of the Apostle; and therefore I am thine." She begged him not to grieve for her, and not to permit himself to be overcome by suffering. For her death was not a dissolution of marriage. With the confidence of a child she assured him, that immediately after her torments in the arena she would tell Christ that her betrothed Marcus had remained in Rome, that he was longing for her with his whole heart. And she thought that Christ would, perhaps, permit her soul to return to him for a moment, to tell him that she was living, that she did not remember her torments, and that she was happy. Her whole letter breathed happiness and hope. There was only one request connected with earthly affairs,—she begged that Vinicius should take her body from the spoliarium and bury it as his wife in the tomb in which he himself will have to rest sometime.

He read her letter with a broken spirit, but at the same time it seemed to him inconceivable that Lygia should perish under the claws of wild beasts, and that Christ should not have pity on her. Hope and trust were hidden in his heart still. When he returned home, he wrote that he would come every day to the walls of Tullianum to wait till Christ would crush the walls and give her to him. He commanded her to believe that Christ could give her to him, even in the circus, that the great Apostle prays to Him to do so and that the hour of liberation was near. The Christian centurion was to bear this letter to her on the next day.

But when Vinicius came to the prison the next morning, the centurion left the rank, approached him first, and said,—

"Listen to me, Lord. Christ who enlightened thee has shown thee favor. Last night Cæsar's freedman and those

of the prefect came to select Christian maidens for disgrace; they inquired about thy betrothed, but our Lord sent her a fever, of which prisoners are dying in the Tullianum and they left her. Last evening she was unconscious, and blessed be the name of the Redeemer, for the sickness which saved her from shame may also save her from death."

Vinicius placed his hand on the shoulder of the soldier, trying not to fall, and the soldier continued,—

"Thank the mercy of the Lord! They took and tortured Linus, but, seeing that he was dying they left him. They may give her now to thee, and Christ will give back health to her."

The young tribune stood for a time with his head lowered, then he raised it and said in a whisper,—

"True, centurion. Christ, who saved her from shame will save her from death." He sat at the wall of the prison till evening, when he returned home to send people for Linus and have him taken to one of his suburban villas.

But when Petronius had heard of this he decided to take further action also. He went to the Augusta for a second time. He found her at the bed of little Rufius. The child with its head broken was struggling in a fever, and his mother with despair and terror in her heart, was trying to save him, thinking at the same time that even if she did save him it might be only to perish soon by a more dreadful death.

Being exclusively occupied with her own suffering, she did not want even to hear of Vinicius and Lygia, but Petronius frightened her.

"Thou hast offended," said he to her, "a new, unknown divinity. Thou, Augusta, art a worshipper, it seems, of the Hebrew Jehovah; but the Christians maintain that Chrestos is his son, and therefore think, if the anger of the father is not pursuing thee. Who knows but that what struck thee is their vengeance, and the life of Rufius, perhaps, depends on how thou wilt act?"

"What dost thou wish me to do?" asked Poppæa with terror.

"Mollify the offended deities."

"How?"

"Lygia is sick; influence Cæsar or Tigellinus to give her to Vinicius."

"Dost thou think I could do that?" asked she, in despair.

"Thou canst do then something else. If Lygia recovers, she must die. Go thou to the temple of Vesta, and ask the *virgo magna* to be near the Tullianum at the time when they lead the prisoners out to death, and give command to free that maiden. The chief vestal will not refuse thee in that."

"But if Lygia dies of the fever?"

"The Christians say that Chrestos is vengeful but just; may be you will soften Him by thy good intention."

"Let Him give me some sign that He will heal Rufius."

Petronius shrugged his shoulders and said,—*"I have not come as His envoy, divine; but I merely say to thee, better be on good terms with all the gods, Roman and others."*

"I will go," said Poppæa with a broken voice.

Petronius breathed deep. *"At last I have done something for him,"* thought he.

And when he returned to Vinicius he said to him,—

"Pray to thy God that Lygia die not of the fever, for should she survive, the chief vestal will give command to liberate her. The Augusta herself will ask her to do so."

"Christ will free her," said Vinicius, looking at him with eyes in which fever was glittering.

Poppæa, who for the recovery of Rufius was willing to burn hecatombs to all the gods of the world, went that same evening to the vestals in the Forum, leaving her sick child in the care of her faithful nurse, Silvia, by whom she herself had been reared.

But in the court sentence had been issued already against the child; for barely had the litter of the Empress vanished behind the great gate when two freedmen entered the chamber in which her son was resting. One of them threw himself on old Silvia and gagged her; the other, seizing a bronze statue of the Sphinx, stunned the old woman with the very first blow.

After this they approached Rufius. Tortured by fever, the little boy was insensible and did not know what was going on around him; he smiled at them and gazed with his beautiful eyes, as if he would want to recognize them. Stripping from the nurse her girdle, they put it around his neck and pulled it. The child called once for his mother and died. Then they wound him in a sheet and sitting on horses which were waiting ready for them, they flew to Ostia, where they threw the body into the sea.

Poppæa, not finding the *virgo magna*, who with other

vestals was at the house of Vatinius, returned soon to the court. Seeing the empty bed and the cold body of *Silvia*, she fainted, and when they restored her she began to cry; her wild screams were heard all that night and all the day following.

But on the third day *Cæsar* commanded her to appear at a feast, and arraying herself in an amethyst tunic, she came and sat all the time with a stony face, golden haired, silent, wonderful and foreboding like an angel of death.

CHAPTER XI.

BEFORE the *Flavii* had reared the Colosseum, the amphitheatres in Rome were built mainly of wood, and for that reason nearly all of them had burned during the fire. But *Nero*, for the celebration of the promised games, had ordered to build several, and among them a gigantic one, for which they began, immediately after the fire was extinguished, to bring by sea and the *Tiber* great trunks of trees cut on the slopes of *Atlas*; because the games were to surpass all the previous ones in splendor and number of victims, and therefore the space had to be enlarged for people and for animals. Thousands of men were working at the buildings night and day. They built and ornamented without getting tired. Among the populace wonders were told about pillars inlaid with bronze, amber, ivory, mother of pearl, and transmarine tortoise shells. Canals filled with ice cold water from the mountains and running along the seats were to keep an agreeable coolness in the building, even during the greatest heat. A gigantic purple velarium gave shelter from the rays of the sun. Among the rows of seats were disposed vessels for the burning of Arabian perfumes; above them were fixed instruments to sprinkle the spectators with dew of saffron and verbenæ. The famous architects *Severus* and *Celer* put forth all their skill to construct an amphitheatre at once incomparable and fitted for such a number of spectators as none of those known before had been able to accommodate.

And in the day, when the *ludus matutinus* was to begin, throngs of the populace were awaiting from daylight the opening of the gates, listening with delight to the roars of lions, the hoarse growls of panthers, and the howls of dogs.

The beasts had not been fed for two days, but pieces of bloody flesh had been pushed before them to rouse their rage and hunger all the more. At times such a storm of wild voices was raised that people standing before the Circus could not converse, and the more sensitive grew pale from fear. But with the rising of the sun, inside of the Circus hymns resonant but calm were intoned, which the people heard with astonishment, crying: "The Christians, the Christians!" Indeed, many detachments of Christians had been brought to the amphitheatre that night; and not only from one prison as it was intended before, but from all the prisons; a few from each. It was known to the people, that the spectacles would continue through weeks and months, but there were hot discussions as to the possibility of getting through in a single night and day with those Christians who had been intended for that same day. The voices of men, women and children singing the morning hymn were so numerous that spectators of experience asserted that even if one or two hundred persons were sent out at once, the beasts would grow tired, because sated, and not be able to tear to pieces all of them. Others maintained that an excessive number of victims in the arena would divert attention, and not give a chance to enjoy the spectacle.

As the moment drew near for opening the corridors leading to the interior of the building called vomitoria, people grew animated and joyous; they discussed and disputed about various things touching the spectacle. Parties were formed praising the efficiency of lions or tigers in tearing. Here and there people began to make bets. Finally others began to talk about gladiators who were to appear in the arena earlier than the Christians; and again there were parties, some in favor of Samnites, some of Gauls, others of Mirmillons, others of Thracians and of the retiarii. Early in the morning larger and smaller detachments of gladiators began to arrive at the amphitheatre under the lead of the lanistæ. Not wishing to be wearied beforetime, they entered unarmed, often entirely naked, often with green boughs in their hands, or ornamented with flowers, young, beautiful, and full of life. Their bodies, shining from oil, were strong, as if chiseled from marble, and people who love the beauty of shape were delighted. Many of them were well known to the people personally, and every moment shouts were heard: "Hello, Furnius! Hello, Leo! Hello,



“QUO VADIS, DOMINE?”

Maximus! Hello, Diomed!" Young girls turned to them eyes full of admiration and the gladiators, selecting the most beautiful maiden, answered with jests, sending them kisses and shouting, "Embrace me before death does!" Then they vanished in the gates, through which many of them were never to pass again. But new arrivals drew away the attention of the multitude. Behind the gladiators walked *mastigophori*; that is, men armed with scourges whose duty it was to lash and urge forward the combatants. Next mules drew in the direction of the *spoliarium* whole rows of vehicles on which wooden coffins were piled. People were diverted at sight of this judging from the number of coffins the greatness of the spectacle. Next marched in men who were to kill the wounded; they were dressed so that each resembled Charon or Mercury. Then came those, who had to look after order in the circus, and assign places; slaves, to bear around food and refreshments; and finally, pretorians, whom every Cæsar in the amphitheatre had always at hand.

At last the vomitoria were opened and the crowd rushed in. But the number of those assembled was so great that they flowed in and flowed in for hours, till it was a marvel that the Circus could hold such a countless multitude; the roars of the beasts, smelling the exhalations of human bodies, grew louder. While taking places the spectators made an uproar like the waves of the sea in time of storm.

Finally the prefect of the city came surrounded by guards; and after him in unbroken line appeared the litters of senators, consuls, pretors, ediles, officials of the government and the palace, of pretorian officers, patricians, and exquisite ladies. In the sun gleamed the gilding of the litters, the white and multi-colored stuffs, feathers, earrings, jewels, steel of the maces. From the Circus came shouts with which the people greeted the great dignitaries. Small divisions of pretorians arrived from time to time.

But the priests of various temples came somewhat later; only after them the sacred virgins of Vesta were brought in, preceded by lictors. In order to begin the spectacle they were waiting now only for Cæsar, who did not want to expose the people to over-long waiting, and therefore came soon, wishing to win the people by promptness. He came in company with the Augusta and Augustians.

Petronius arrived also among the Augustians and in the same litter with Vinicius. The latter knew that Lygia was

sick and unconscious; but as access to the prison had been forbidden most strictly during the preceding days, and as the former guards had been replaced by new ones who had no right to speak to the jailers or even communicate any information whatever to those who came to inquire about prisoners; he was not even sure that she was not among the victims intended for the first day of spectacles. They might send out even a sick woman for the lions' rage, though she were unconscious. But, as the victims were to be sewed up in skins of wild beasts, and sent to the arena in crowds, no spectator could know whether there might not be among them the one they were interested in. The jailer and all the servants of the amphitheatre were bribed, and a bargain made with the beast-keepers to hide Lygia in some dark corner, and give her at night into the hands of a confidant of Vinicius, who would take her at once to the Alban hills. Petronius, initiated into the secret, advised Vinicius to go with him openly to the amphitheatre and after he had entered, in the hurry of the crowd, to go down to the vaults and, to avoid possible mistake, to point out Lygia to the guards.

The guards admitted him through a small door through which they came out themselves. One of them, named Cyrus, led him at once to the Christians. On the way he said:

"I knew not, lord, whether thou wilt find what thou art seeking. We inquired about the girl named Lygia, but no one answered us; it may be, though, that they do not trust us."

"Are there many?" inquired Vinicius.

"Many, lord, had to wait till to-morrow."

"Are there sick ones among them?"

"Such that could not stand were not among them."

Having said this, Cyrus opened a door, and they entered as it were an enormous chamber, but low and dark, for the light came in only through grated openings which separated it from the arena. At first Vinicius could see nothing; he heard only the murmur of voices, and the shouts of people from the amphitheatre; but after a while, when his eyes had grown used to the gloom, he saw crowds of strange beings, resembling wolves and bears. Those were Christians sewed up in skins of beasts. Some of them were standing, others were kneeling in prayer. Here and there, by the long hair flowing over the skin, one might recognize a

woman. Mothers, resembling wolves, carried on their arms children sewed up in equally shaggy coverings. But from beneath the skins were seen bright faces and eyes which in the gloom gleamed with delight and feverishness.

Vinicius, after walking about the victims and inquiring for Lygia in vain, stopped on a sudden, for he seemed to hear near the grating a voice known to him. He listened for a while, turned to the side from which the voice came, and pushing through the crowd, went nearer. A sheaf of light fell on the head of the speaker, and in that light, under the skin of a wolf, Vinicius recognized the emaciated and implacable countenance of Crispus.

"Mourn for your sins," exclaimed Crispus, "for the moment is near. But who so thinks by death to redeem his sins, commits a fresh sin, and will be hurled into endless fire. The just and the sinner will die the same death, but the Lord will distinguish His own. Woe to you, the claws of the lions will rend your bodies, but they shall not rend your sins, nor your reckoning with God!"

And stretching out his bony hands, Crispus shook them over his bent head; he was unterrified and implacable even in the presence of death to which in a while all those doomed people were to go. After his words were heard the voices:

"We bewail our sins!" And then came silence; only the cry of children was audible, and the beating of hands against breasts. The blood of Vinicius stiffened in his veins. He was seized by fear that he would faint like those against whose bodies he had stumbled while searching about for Lygia, and remembering that they might open the grating any moment, began to call Lygia and Ursus aloud, in the hope that, if not they, some one knowing them would answer.

In fact, at that moment, some one dressed as a bear, pulled his toga, and said:

"Lord, they remained in prison. I was the last one brought out, and I saw her sick on the couch."

"Who art thou?" inquired Vinicius.

"The quarryman in whose hut the Apostle baptized thee, lord. They seized me three days ago, and to day I die."

Vinicius breathed freely. When entering he had rushed to find Lygia; now he was even ready to thank Christ that she was not there, and to see in that a sign of His mercy.

Meanwhile the quarryman pulled his toga again, and said :

"Dost remember, lord, that I conducted thee to the vineyard of Cornelius, when the Apostle discoursed in the shed?"

"I remember!" replied Vinicius.

"I saw him later, the day before they imprisoned me. He blessed me and said that he would come to the amphitheatre to take leave of the condemned. I should like to look at him at the moment of death, and see the sign of the cross, for it would be easier for me to die; therefore, if thou know where he is, lord, inform me."

Vinicius lowered his voice and said :

"He is among the people of Petronius, disguised as a slave. I know not which places they chose, but I will return to the Circus and see."

"Thanks to thee, lord, and peace be with thee."

"May the Redeemer be merciful to thee."

"Amen."

Vinicius went out of the cuniculum and betook himself to the amphitheatre, where he had a place near Petronius among the other Augustians.

"Is she here?" asked Petronius.

"No; she remained in prison."

"Hear what has come to my head; but while listening look at Nigidia, so that we may seem to talk of her hair-dressing. Tigellinus and Chilo are looking at us now. Listen then. Let them put Lygia in a coffin at night and carry her out as a corpse,—dost divine the rest?"

"Yes!" answered Vinicius.

Their further conversation was interrupted by Tullius Senecio, who, bending toward them, asked :

"Do you know whether they will give weapons to the Christians?"

"We know not," replied Petronius.

"I should wish that arms were given,"—said Tullius; "if not the arena will become like a butcher's shambles too early. But what a splendid amphitheatre!"

The sight was indeed magnificent. The lower seats, crowded with togas, were as white as snow. In the gilded podium sat Cæsar, wearing a diamond collar, and a golden crown on his head; next to him sat the beautiful and gloomy Augusta, and on both sides were vestal virgins, great officials, senators in purple togas, officers of the army

with glittering weapons,—in a word, all that was powerful, brilliant and rich in Rome. In the farther rows sat knights, and higher up darkened in rows a sea of common heads, above which from pillar to pillar hung festoons of roses, lilies, ivy, and grapevines.

People conversed aloud, called to one another, sang ; at times they broke out into laughter at some witty word which was sent from row to row, and stamped with impatience to hasten the beginning of the spectacle. At last the stamping became like an unbroken thunder. Then the prefect of the city, who had come before with a brilliant retinue, rode around the arena and gave a signal with a handkerchief which was answered throughout the amphitheatre by “ Ah-ah-a ! ” from thousands of breasts.

Usually, a spectacle was begun by hunts of wild beasts, in which Southern and Northern barbarians excelled ; but this time, as they had too many beasts, they began the spectacle with andabates,—that is, men wearing helmets without an opening for the eye, hence fighting blindfold.

After the first interval, came the turn of the Christians. That was an entirely new spectacle for the people, and no one knew how the Christians would bear themselves ; hence all waited with curiosity. The disposition of the audience was attentive because they were waiting for uncommon scenes, but unfriendly to the Christians. Those people who were to appear had burned Rome and its ancient treasures. They had drank the blood of infants, and poisoned water ; they had cursed the whole human race, and committed the vilest crimes. Death and terror seemed hovering in the air. The throng, usually gladsome, became moody under the influence of hate and silence. Faces had a sullen expression.

Now the prefect gave a sign, and in that moment appeared the same old man, dressed as Charon, who had called the gladiators to death, and passing with slow step across the arena, he struck again three times on the door amid silence.

Throughout the whole amphitheatre was heard the deep murmur :

“ The Christians ! The Christians ! ”

The spectacle was terrible. Hundreds of Christians were led in and were torn to pieces first by gigantic dogs from Molossia, from Peloponnesus, from the Pyrenees, and from Hibernia, then by lions ; and then by beasts of all kinds,—

tigers from the Euphrates, Numidian panthers, bears, wolves, hyenas and jackals. There was a chaos surpassing description. The spectacle lost the appearance of reality, and became as it were a bloody orgy, a dreadful dream, a gigantic kaleidoscope of mad fancy. Amidst roars, howls and whines, here and there on the seats of the spectators was heard the terrified and spasmodic laughter of women whose strength had given way at last. The people were terrified. Faces grew dark. Various voices began to cry: "Enough! Enough!"

And amid the applause, the uproar, the terror and blood-thirstiness of the crowd were heard the hymns of the dying Christians, and the words: "Pro Christo! Pro Christo!"

From the highest row in the amphitheatre the Apostle Peter looked at them. No one saw him, for all heads were turned to the arena; so he rose and blest with the cross those who were perishing under the teeth of wild beasts.

It was easier to let the beasts in than to drive them out. But Cæsar found a means of clearing the arena which was at the same time a new amusement for the people. In all the passages between the seats appeared detachments of Numidians, black and stately, in feathers and earrings, with bows in their hands. The people understood that a new spectacle was coming, and greeted the archers with a shout of delight. The Numidians approached the railing and, putting their arrows to the strings, began to shoot from their bows into the crowd.

That was a new spectacle truly. The bodies, well-shapen, as if cut from black marble, bent backward, stretched the flexible bows, and sent bolt after bolt.

When all the beasts were shot down, hundreds of circus-slaves appeared in the arena with spades, shovels, brooms, wheelbarrows, and baskets for carrying out entrails and bags of sand. The place was soon cleared, dug over, and sprinkled with a thick layer of fresh sand. Then cupids ran in, scattering leaves of roses, lilies, and a variety of flowers. The censers were lit again, and the velarium was removed, for the sun had sunk now considerably. The people looked at each other with amazement, asking each other what kind of new spectacle was waiting for them on that day.

Indeed, such a spectacle was waiting as no one expected. Cæsar, who had left the podium some time ago, appeared all at once on the flowery arena, wearing a purple mantle

and a crown of gold. Twelve choristers holding citharæ followed him; and he holding a silver lute, advanced with solemn tread to the middle, bowed a number of times to the spectators, lifted his eyes and stood for some time as if waiting for inspiration. His voice trembled, his eyes were filled with tears; tears appeared on the lids of the vestals. The people listened to his song in silence and then burst out in a thunder of applause.

Meanwhile, from outside through the open doors of the vomitoria came the sound of creaking vehicles on which were placed the bloody remnants of Christians, men, women, and children, to be taken to the pits called "puticuli."

And the Apostle Peter seized his trembling white head with his hand, and cried in spirit:

"O Lord, O Lord, to whom hast Thou given dominion over this earth, and why wilt Thou found in this place Thy Capitol?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE rays of the setting sun were beginning to merge into evening, when the performance was over. Multitudes were pouring from the amphitheatre through the vomitoria; but the Augustians lingered yet in order to escape the crowding. They had left their places, however, and gathered at the podium, where Cæsar again showed himself to receive their praises. Though showers of praise and flattery had fallen upon him as he finished the song; though the vestals had kissed his "divine" hand, and Rubria's hair had swept his breast while doing so, Nero was entirely dissatisfied. He had expected to see the people wild with wonder and delight. He was disappointed, as well as surprised, too, at the silence of Petronius, from whom he could have wished just then, some critical or approving remark. When he could endure this silence no longer, he beckoned Petronius to him.

"Speak," he said, as Petronius entered.

"I cannot find words," Petronius replied, quietly. "Thou hast exceeded thyself."

"I imagined so, too; but these people,"—

"How canst thou expect mongrels to appreciate poetry?"

"Thou, too, hast seen, then, that they have not given me thanks enough."

"Thou didst not choose an appropriate time."

"How so?"

"They could not give close enough attention; their brains were filled with the scent of blood."

"Ah, those Christians again!" said Nero, furiously. "They fired Rome, now they wrong me! How shall I punish them enough?"

Petronius now saw he had made a mistake—that Nero had taken his words in a different light from what he intended; so to turn the subject of his thoughts he whispered,—

"It is a marvelous song; but in the fourth line of the third strophe, the metre is not quite smooth enough."

Nero reddened, and a look almost of shame and fear passed over his face. He replied in a whisper,—

"I know. Nothing escapes thee! But I will write that over. I do not think any one else has perceived it, and for the love of the gods, do not mention it—if thou love thy life."

Petronius feigned an outburst of indignation, and replied,—

"Command my death, if I deceive thee, divinity; but thou canst not terrify me, for the gods know that I do not fear death."

He gazed straight into the eyes of Cæsar as he said this, who after awhile replied,—

"Be not angry; I love thee, as thou dost know."

"That argues ill," thought Petronius.

"I would have invited thee to a feast to-day," Cæsar went on, "but I would rather retire quietly, and improve that cursed line. Seneca may also have noticed it, and possibly Secundus Carinas; but I will quickly be rid of both."

He immediately called Seneca, and commanded him to go with Acratus and Secundus to all the provinces for money; to cities, villages, famous temples, or indeed anywhere where it was possible to find it, or take it by force. But Seneca, not approving of such plunder and sacrilege, bluntly declined.

"Lord, I am old and my nerves are weak; I must go to the country and await death."

Seneca's nerves were not so bad as Chilo's, but he was not in good health, for he had lately grown very thin and his hair was now quite white.

As Nero looked at him, he thought that he might not have to wait very long for his death.

"I will not send thee on such a journey if thou art sick," he said. "But my affection would have thee near me; stay therefore in thy house, and do not leave it."

Here he laughed, remarking, "To send Acratus and Carinas alone is like sending wolves to bring me sheep. Whom shall I put over them?"

"Me, lord," said Domitius Afer.

"No! I do not wish to expose Rome to the wrath of Mercury, as thy villainy would surely do! I need a stoic like Seneca, or this philosopher, Chilo."

Glancing around, he inquired,—

"But where is Chilo?"

The open air had somewhat revived Chilo, and he returned to the amphitheatre in time to hear Nero's song. He now stepped forward, saying,—

"I am here, O Radiant Child of the sun and moon! I was sick, but thy song restored me."

"I will commission thee to go to Achæa. Thou wilt know to a nicety how much each temple contains."

"If thou wilt do so, O Zeus, the gods will send thee such tribute as has never before been received by any one."

"I would do so, but I like not to deprive thee of a sight of the games."

"Baal!" exclaimed Chilo.

The Augustians who were overjoyed to perceive that Cæsar had recovered from his ill temper, laughed, and cried,—

"No, lord, do not hinder this brave Greek from seeing the games."

"But save me, lord, from a sight of these noisy geese of the Capitol, whose brains combined would go into a nutshell," Chilo retorted. "I am composing a hymn to thee, O Apollo, and I beg leave to go to the temple of the Muses to pray for inspiration."

"Not so," replied Nero. "Thou desirest only to escape the games."

"I swear, lord, I am composing a hymn."

"Then it will have to be composed at night, when thou canst seek inspiration from Diana, who, as it happens, is Apollo's sister."

Chilo hung his head, and glanced maliciously around on

the laughing crowd. Cæsar turned to Senecio and Suilius Nerulinus, and said,—

“Of the Christians appointed for to-day’s games scarcely the half are finished.”

Old Aquilus Regulus, who had had great experience in everything appertaining to the amphitheatre, thereupon remarked,—

“Games in which the people appear without arms are not so amusing and take up nearly as much time.”

“I will give command to supply them with weapons,” Nero replied.

Just then Vestinius roused himself from a reverie. He was exceedingly superstitious, and inquired now, in a mysterious tone,—

“Have ye noticed that they look up and see something before they die, and then seem to have no pain. I am sure they do.”

He looked up to the opening then, over which the star-bejewelled velarium of night was beginning to spread. He was answered by a chorus of laughter and jests as to what was seen at the time of death by the Christians.

Cæsar now departed, preceded by a band of slaves bearing torches, and followed by the vestals, senators, and Augustians. It was a warm, pleasant evening, and many of the people had lingered behind to see the departure of Cæsar. A little shouting and praise were heard, but for the most part, they were gloomy and quiet. The creaking of carts was also heard from the spoliarium as they carried away the mangled remains of Christians.

Petronius and Vinicius proceeded on their way in silence. As they neared the house only, did Petronius speak.

“Hast thou thought over what I said?”

“I have,” replied Vinicius.

“Believe me, that this is to me also a question of the greatest consequence. I must free her, no matter what comes of it. I am playing a game that I must win, fighting a battle I must gain, in spite of Tigellinus and Cæsar, even if it cost me my life. I am more than ever determined.”

“May Christ reward thee!”

“Thou shalt see.”

They had now arrived at the door of the house and as they alighted from the litter, they were met by a dark figure who inquired,

"Is this the noble Vinicius?"

"Yes," answered the young tribune. "What dost thou wish?"

"I am Nazarius, son of Miriam. I am come from the prison with news of Lygia."

Vinicius was not able to speak, but he laid his hand on the shoulder of the youth, and looked questioninglly into his eyes. Nazarius instinctively knew the question he was unable to utter, and replied,—

"She is alive yet. Ursus has sent me to tell thee, that in her fever she prays, and utters thy name repeatedly."

"Praise to Christ who can restore her to me."

They together entered the library, where shortly afterward Petronius joined them, to hear their plans.

"She was saved from shame, because of her sickness," said Nazarius, "for executioners are afraid. Ursus, and the physician Glaucus, watch over her continually."

"Are the same guards there?"

"Yes, and she is in their room. The fever and the poisonous air have killed all those who were imprisoned in the lower dungeon."

"Who art thou?" asked Petronius.

"I am known to the noble Vinicius, for I am the widow's son at whose house Lygia lodged."

"Art thou a Christian?"

The young man threw a questioning glance at Vinicius, and observing that he was praying, he looked up, and answered,

"I am."

"How is it that thou hast access to the prison?"

"I have hired myself to assist in carrying out the corpses. In this way I can help my brethren, and carry to them tidings from the city."

Petronius looked closely at the youth's handsome face, with its blue eyes and thick dark hair.

"Of what country art thou?" he asked.

"I am from Galilee, lord."

"Dost thou wish to see Lygia free?"

"Yes, even did it cost me my life."

Vinicius had ceased to pray, and now said,

"Persuade the guards to put her in a coffin as though she were one of the dead, and get assistants to help thee to carry her out. I will have a litter in readiness near the 'Putrid Pits,' and some of my people will take the coffin

from you. Tell the guards from me, that each shall have as much gold as he can carry in his cloak."

As he spoke the face of the young soldier lost its stony look of despair, and hope seemed to renew his energy.

Nazarius was radiant with joy. Lifting his hands, he cried,

"Christ send her health; she will be free!"

"Will the guards be willing?" inquired Petronius.

"Yes, lord, if they have naught to fear from torture or punishment."

"They would consent to her flight," said Vinicius, "so they will the more readily consent to her removal as a corpse."

"True," said Nazarius, "a man with red hot iron burns the bodies as they are carried out, to be sure they are dead. But a few sesteria would be sufficient to persuade him not to touch the face of the dead with the iron. He would touch the coffin instead for one aureus."

"Tell him he shall have a cap full of aurei," exclaimed Petronius. "Canst thou get assistants on whom thou canst depend?"

"I can find such, as would deliver up their own wives and children for money."

"Where canst thou get them?"

"Either in the city, or in the prison itself. When once the guards have been bribed they will give entrance to whomsoever I bring."

"Take me with thee then, as a servant," said Vinicius.

Petronius, however, would not hear of this.

"The pretorians know thee, and might easily penetrate thy disguise and then all would be lost. Go not either to the 'Putrid Pits'; Cæsar, Tigellinus and every one else must be thoroughly convinced that she died, or they will instantly institute a search. This is the only way in which we can ward off suspicion. We must remain in Rome, while she is taken to the Alban hills, or to Sicily. Some time later, thou shalt be taken sick, and be attended by Nero's own physician, who will recommend thee to go to the mountains. There ye will meet, and"—

He paused to think awhile, then waving his hand, continued,

"Better times may come."

"Christ have mercy on her!" said Vinicius. "She is sick, perhaps unto death, and thou speakest of Sicily."

"We will not remove her far from Rome for awhile. She will recover with the fresh air alone, if we can free her from the dungeon. Hast thou not a steward in the mountains on whom thou canst depend?"

"I have," Vinicius replied, eagerly. "I have a trusty servant near Corioli, who nursed me when a child, and who still bears an affection for me."

"Send to him to come at once," said Petronius, as he passed writing tablets to Vinicius. "I will send a courier immediately."

He summoned the chief of the atrium to carry his orders, and in a few minutes a slave on horseback was speeding in the direction of Corioli.

"I would be better pleased did Ursus accompany her," said Vinicius. "My mind would be more easy."

"Lord," said Nazarius, "he is a man of supernatural strength; he can break the bars and follow. There is one window where no guard watches. Below it is a high steep rock; I will procure a rope, and Ursus will manage the rest."

"By Hercules!" exclaimed Petronius, "he may do as he pleases about that, but not at the same time, nor yet a few days later. They would follow him and discover her. By Hercules! would you destroy everything? Mention not Corioli to him, or I wash my hands of you?"

They were silent, perceiving the justice of his remarks; and promising to return at dawn Nazarius departed.

He wished to pass the remainder of the night at the prison, but must first run in to reassure his mother, who in that time of peril and uncertainty was in perpetual anxiety concerning the safety of her son. On further reflection he had come to the conclusion that instead of seeking an assistant in the city he could bribe one of the other corpse-bearers. Before leaving, he drew Vinicius apart, and whispered,

"I will let no one know of our plan, not even my mother; but the Apostle Peter promised to call at our house on his way from the amphitheatre. I will tell him all."

"Fear not to speak openly here," said Vinicius. "The Apostle was among the people of Petronius in the amphitheatre. But, stay, I will accompany thee."

He called for a slave's mantle, and they went out together. Petronius breathed a heavy sigh.

"I had hoped she might die in the fever," said he; "it would not have been so fearful to Vinicius. But I would

gladly offer to Esculapius a golden tripod for her recovery. And so, Ahenobarbus, thou wouldst have made a public exhibition of a lover's sufferings; and thou, Augusta, wert jealous because of the greater beauty of the maiden, and angry because of the death of thy Rufius; and thou, Tigellinus, sought to spite me in the death of the maiden! Well, we shall see! Ye shall not have the satisfaction of seeing her in the arena, for unless she dies a natural death, I will snatch her from your grasp in a manner ye will be unconscious of; and then, whenever I behold you after that, I shall think, 'Here are the fools, outwitted by Caius Petronius.'

And, well satisfied with himself he entered the triclinium where supper and Eunice were awaiting him. They were entertained during the meal, with the reading of the Idyls of Theocritus. Outside, a sudden wind blew clouds from Soracte, and the quiet of the summer night was all at once broken by a heavy storm. Thunder rolled among the seven hills; but they listened to the recital of the loves of shepherds, as they reclined near each other; and soon after with minds at ease, they prepared for peaceful rest.

Vinicius returned before they retired. Petronius hearing him, went to meet him.

"Well? Have ye made any other arrangements?" he asked. "Is Nazarius gone to the prison?"

"Yes," answered Vinicius. "He has arranged with the guards; and I have been with Peter, who has encouraged me to trust and pray."

"That is right. If all be well we shall be able to carry her away to-morrow night."

"My steward should arrive by daybreak with his men."

"It is but a short distance. Now take some rest."

But Vinicius knelt down in his cubiculum to pray.

Niger, the steward, arrived from Corioli at break of day, accompanied by four trusty British slaves with mules and a litter. These he had left at an inn in the Subura, in order to avoid suspicion. He was met by Vinicius, who had watched for his coming throughout the night.

His young master's appearance greatly moved Niger, who kissed his eyes and hands, exclaiming,

"Thou art sick, my dear, or pain has driven the blood from thy cheeks. At first sight of thee, I scarcely was able to recognize thee."

Vinicius took him within, and told him all the secret.

Niger listened attentively, and his sunburnt face betrayed much feeling, which he made no effort to suppress.

"She is a Christian then?" cried Niger, as he gave an inquiring glance into the face of Vinicius. He evidently understood the questioning look of the man, for he replied, "I also am a Christian."

For a moment Niger's eyes were suffused with tears; then he lifted up his hands, exclaiming,

"I thank thee, Christ, that thou hast removed the beam from these eyes, which to me are the dearest earth holds."

He again embraced Vinicius, weeping with joy. Just at this moment Petronius entered with Nazarius.

"Good news!" he cried, as he advanced toward them.

And such it was. Glaucus had predicted for a certainty, that Lygia would recover, although she was suffering from the same sort of fever from which hundreds were dying every day in the various prisons. The guards, the man who burned the corpses with hot irons, and Attys the assistant corpse-bearer had all been arranged with.

"We have made holes in the coffin through which she can breathe," Nazarius said. "There is only one danger now, and that is, that a groan or word may escape from her as we pass the guards. But she is terribly weak, and has been lying unconscious since morning. Moreover, I have brought to Glaucus certain drugs he directed me to get, and from which he will mix her a sleeping draught. We shall not nail down the coffin lid, so that it will be easily raised when ye carry the patient to the litter. Lay in her place a long bag of sand."

Vinicius listened with eager, pale face, as if he read beforehand, the words Nazarius would utter.

"Will other bodies be carried out at the same time?" asked Petronius.

"About twenty died last night," said the boy, "and others will die before evening. A company will go together, but we will linger and drop behind, and when we reach the corner my comrade will contrive to become accidentally lame, so that we shall fall far behind the rest. Be in waiting at the temple of Libitina, and may God give us a dark night!"

"He will," replied Niger. "Yesternight, the sky was bright, and a storm broke suddenly; the sky has been clear all day, but it is oppressive. Every night for awhile will be stormy."

"Do ye not carry torches?" asked Vinicius.

"They go in advance. But at any rate, be near the temple at dusk, though we do not generally bring out the corpses until near midnight."

They stopped. No sound was heard save the deep breathing of Vinicius. Petronius turned to him, remarking,

"Yesterday I thought it would be better for us both to remain at home, but I cannot remain. We should have to exercise the most extreme caution if it were a question of her fleeing from prison, but as she will be carried out as a corpse no suspicion is likely to be aroused."

"True," replied Vinicius, "I must go. I myself will lift her from the coffin."

"When once we reach my house at Corioli," said Niger, "I will be responsible for her safety."

They ceased. Niger went back to the inn where he had left his men, and Nazarius, bearing under his tunic a purse filled with gold, departed for the prison. Vinicius commenced a day alternately filled with alarm and excitement, fear and hope.

"We have arranged our plans well and should be successful," said Petronius. "It is needful for thee to wear a dark toga, and appear to suffer greatly. Every one must see thee. We cannot fail now! Art thou certain of thy manager?"

"He is a Christian," said Vinicius.

Petronius was astonished, then he shrugged his shoulders, speaking half to himself,—

"By Pollux! how it increases and seems to draw the souls of people. Any one would renounce all the Roman, Greek and Egyptian gods, under less persecution than this. But it is marvelous. Spare nothing to thy Christ."

"I have given my soul to Him," replied Vinicius.

With this they separated, Petronius to his cubiculum, and Vinicius to view the prison from a distance. Afterward he wended his way to the quarryman's hut on the Vatican hill, where the Apostle had baptized him. It seemed to him that he could approach Christ better here than elsewhere, and he flung himself down in an agony of prayer and supplication for mercy. So absorbed was he, that he no longer remembered where he was, or what he did, until the sound of trumpets from the Circus roused him to the fact that it was past midday. He left the hut, looking about him with eyes almost dazed.

It was very oppressive, and the air was hot and sultry. Although the sky was clear overhead, clouds were gathering over the Sabine hills.

Vinicius went home, where he found Petronius awaiting him in the atrium.

"I showed myself on the Palatine," he said; "and even joined them at dice. Anicius will hold a feast at his house to-night; I have promised to be there, but not until after midnight. I made excuse that I must sleep until then. I intend to go, and should advise thee to go also."

"Has no news come from Niger or Nazarius?" asked Vinicius.

"No; we shall not see them until midnight. Dost thou see that a storm is gathering?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps it will cause the exhibition of crucified Christians to be put off. It was arranged for to-morrow." Then, drawing nearer, and tapping his nephew's shoulder, he added: "But thou wilt not see her there; only in Corioli wilt thou see her. By Castor! The moment we free her will be more precious to me than would be all the gems in Rome. It is getting near evening."

Dark clouds had covered the sky and the night came in with heavy rain. The heat from the stones caused a mist to rise from the ground which enveloped the streets. This was succeeded by a calm, and afterward by short, heavy showers.

"We must hasten," said Vinicius. "The storm may cause them to take away the bodies earlier than usual."

"It is time to go," said Petronius.

They wrapped themselves in hooded Gallic mantles, and entered the street through the door in the garden. Petronius, as was usual in his night expeditions, carried with him a short Roman knife called a "sicca."

The storm had emptied the streets. Occasional flashes of lightning illuminated the road, lighting up the walls of buildings, and the wet flagstones which had been newly laid. After going a rather long distance, one such flash showed them the mound, where stood the temple of Libitina, and at the base, a group of horses and mules.

"Niger!" called Vinicius, softly.

"I am here, lord," a voice replied through the rain.

"Is everything in readiness?"

"It is. We came at dark. But the rain will drench

you; take shelter under the rampart. What a terrible storm! I fear we shall have hail!"

Niger's predictions were soon fulfilled, for presently hail commenced to fall, small at first, but gradually becoming larger and thicker; and the air grew suddenly cold. While sheltering under the rampart, they spoke together in whispers.

"Should people see us, they will suspect nothing," said Niger. "They will only take us for travelers, waiting for the passing of the storm. I am afraid, though, that the bodies may not be brought out until morning."

"It will soon pass," said Petronius. "At all events we must wait until dawn."

They continued waiting and listening. The hail was succeeded by a sharp shower, and occasional gusts of winds carried from the "Putrid Pits" a fearful stench of decaying corpses, that had been buried too near the surface.

"There is a light!" said Niger,— "one, two, three,— they are torches! See that there is no sound from the mules," said he to his men.

"They are coming!" exclaimed Petronius.

The lights became more and more distinct, until torches were plainly visible.

Niger made the sign of the cross, as he commenced to pray. The procession slowly advanced, until it halted before the temple of Libitina. The watchers silently crept up to the rampart, not knowing why the procession had stopped. But it was only to allow the men to wrap cloths over their faces and mouths, to protect them from the evil odors, which were almost unendurable at the edge of the "Pits." After this, they raised the coffins and passed on. Only one coffin stopped, and Vinicius, followed by the rest, sprang forward. Behind, came the two British slaves, carrying the litter. Before they reached it, however, the voice of Nazarius was heard through the darkness, quivering with pain:

"Lord, they have removed her and Ursus to the Esquiline prison. They fetched them before midnight. This is another body we carry."

Petronius did not attempt to comfort Vinicius, he was thoughtful and silent as they returned. He knew that any attempt to rescue Lygia from the Esquiline prison would be madness. He had guessed the reason for the removal of her and Ursus from the Tullianum. They had no intention

of permitting her to escape the amphitheatre by dying, and so she was watched and guarded carefully. Petronius grieved for her and Vinicius from the depths of his soul, but he was also stung to the quick by the thought that he had failed for the first time in his life, that for the first time the struggle had gone against him.

"Fortune is deserting me," thought he; "but if the gods think I will accept defeat easily, they make a great mistake."

He turned to Vinicius, who returned his look with a stony gaze.

"What is it? Thou art in a fever!" he cried.

But Vinicius answered him in a strange, strained, broken voice, like a feeble child.

"I believe—that He—can restore her to me."

The last echoes of the storm had died away over the city.

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE days' rain—a rare phenomenon in Rome during summer—and hail falling, contrary to the laws of nature, not only in the day, but even at night, interrupted the spectacles. The people were alarmed. A failure of grapes was predicted, and when, one day a thunderbolt melted the bronze statue of Ceres on the Capitol, sacrifices were made in the temple of Jove. The priests of Ceres spread a report that the anger of the gods was turned on the city because the Christians had been tolerated too long, and the crowds insisted on the resumption of the spectacles, in spite of the weather. Rome rejoiced when, after three days' interruption the "ludi" began again.

Meanwhile fine weather returned. The amphitheatre began to fill with people at daybreak. Cæsar also came early with his vestals and the court. The spectacle was to commence with combats among the Christians. They were arrayed in gladiatorial outfits, and carried weapons of offense and defense. But disappointment awaited the crowd. The Christians threw down the nets and weapons, began to embrace and to urge each other to meet the tortures and death with courage. The spectators expressed indignation and resentment. Some taunted them with cowardice, others asserted that they refused to fight because of the hatred

they bore the people, and of the desire to deprive them of the pleasure of a display of courage. Finally Cæsar ordered real gladiators into the arena, and the kneeling, unarmed Christians were dispatched in an instant.

The corpses were removed, the arena cleared, and the spectacle was changed to a series of mythological representations, suggested by Cæsar. First of all, the crowd was shown Hercules burning on a pyre on Mount Oeta. Vinicius shuddered at the thought that Ursus might be given the rôle of Hercules, but the turn of the faithful servant of Lygia had not come yet, for a Christian entirely unknown to him was burning. But in the next picture Chilo, whom Cæsar would not permit to depart from the arena, saw something familiar to him. The death of Dædalus and Icarus was represented. Euricius came forth in the rôle of Dædalus, and the rôle of Icarus was given to his son Quartus. The two were raised to an enormous height by special machinery, and hurled down into the arena. Young Quartus fell so near Cæsar's podium, that his blood spattered not only the outside ornamentations but the purple covered border. Chilo did not see the fall; he closed his eyes, and only heard the thud of the falling body; but when he caught a glimpse of blood near him, he nearly swooned a second time. The representations changed rapidly. The torture of the maidens, who were first violated by gladiators dressed as wild beasts, enraptured the crowd. They saw the priestesses Cybele and Ceres, the Danaïdes, Dirce and Pasiphæ; finally they saw very young girls, who were torn by wild horses. The people showered applause on Cæsar at every novel representation, and he, proud and happy, looked through his polished emerald at the white bodies torn by iron pincers, and the quivering flesh of the expiring victims. Pictures were given also illustrating the history of the Roman people. After the girls, came Mucius Scævola, his arm tied to an iron tripod filled with burning coals. The smell of burning flesh filled the amphitheatre, but the martyr, like a genuine Scævola, did not utter a cry or moan, but stood with eyes lifted to heaven, and with blackened lips murmured a prayer. He was dispatched and his body deposited in the spoliarium. Then came the midday recess. Cæsar with the vestals and Augustians left the amphitheatre and went into a larger purple tent, specially erected for the occasion, where a magnificent prandium was served. The crowd followed his example,

and settled in picturesque groups around the tent to rest their weary limbs, and partake of the refreshments distributed at Cæsar's command by his slaves. Only the most curious descended to the arena, and taking a handful of sand mixed with blood, discussed like connoisseurs the next representations. They finally departed leaving only those who remained out of commiseration for the victims.

The servants meanwhile levelled the arena, and began to dig pits in rows, from one wall of the amphitheatre to the other, so that the last row was within a few feet of Cæsar's podium. From without came hand-clapping, conversations and calls, and within new tortures were being prepared with feverish activity. All at once the cunicula were opened, and at the doors appeared crowds of Christians, naked and bearing crosses on their backs. The arena was crowded with them. Old men came, bent under the weight of the wooden crosses, young men in the prime of life, women with loosened hair, with which they tried to conceal their nakedness, young boys and little children followed in quick succession. The crosses, as well as the victims were ornamented with flowers. The servants, with sticks in hand, urged on the victims, made them lay the crosses near the corresponding pits and stand themselves in rows. Thus were to perish those who were not driven out to be torn by wild beasts. Black slaves caught the Christians, and placed them, back downward on the crosses, and nailed their hands on the crossbeams. It was done in great haste, that the people returning might find the crosses in their places. The whole amphitheatre resounded with the blows of hammers. The echo of the blows reached the square around the amphitheatre, the tent in which Cæsar was entertaining his friends and the vestals. In the tent they were drinking wine, and bantering with Chilo; Augustians were whispering strange words into the ears of the priests of Vesta; but in the arena the work was seething; the nails went deeper into the hands and feet of the Christians.

Among the victims whose turn had come was Crispus. There was no time for the lions to tear him, so the cross fell to his share; but he, always ready for death, consoled himself with the thought that the hour had struck. He looked a different man; his shrivelled body was entirely naked, only a girdle of ivy encircling his hips, and on his head was a garland of roses. But in his eyes burned the old-time energy; from beneath the garland gazed the same

stern and fanatical face. And his heart was unchanged; he continued to threaten instead of consoling his brethren.

"Thank the Redeemer," said Crispus, "that He permits you to die the death that He Himself died. Some of your sins may be forgiven you for this; but tremble, for justice must be requited, and there cannot be the same treatment for the just and the wicked."

The sound of the hammers only responded. Crispus, turning to those not yet nailed, continued:

"I see the heavens rent in twain, but I also see the open abyss. I know not myself what account I will give to God, but I believed in Him, and hated evil; and I fear not death, but resurrection; not the tortures, but the judgment, for the day of wrath is approaching."

At this time from the nearest rows of the amphitheatre came a calm and solemn voice,—

"Not the day of wrath, but the day of mercy; the day of redemption and of bliss. I tell ye that Christ will comfort you, and seat you at His right hand. Be confident,—heaven is opening before you."

At these words all eyes were turned in the direction of the benches; even those who were nailed to the crosses raised their pale, tortured faces. The speaker came near the barrier that divided him from the arena, and blessed the Christians with the sign of the cross. Crispus extended to him his hand, as if to curse him, but seeing the speaker's face his knees shook, and he whispered: "Paul the Apostle!"

To the great astonishment of the servants, all the Christians that were waiting to be nailed knelt down, and Paul of Tarsus said, turning to Crispus:

"Crispus, do not threaten them, for even this day will they be with thee in heaven. Thinkest thou they will be condemned? But who will condemn them? Will God who gave His Son for them? Will Christ, who died for their salvation as they die in His name? And how can He who loves condemn? Who will say of this blood, 'It is cursed'?"

"Master, I hate evil," said the old priest.

"Christ commanded rather to love men, than to hate evil, for His teaching is love, not hatred."

"I have sinned in the hour of death," answered Crispus, beating his breast.

At this moment the chief of the amphitheatre approached the Apostle, and asked:

"Who art thou that shouldst speak to the condemned?"

"A Roman citizen," calmly answered Paul, and turning to Crispus, added: "Be confident, for this is a day of grace; die in peace, servant of God."

Two black slaves came to place Crispus on the cross. He again turned around, and exclaimed:

"My brethren, pray for me!"

His face lost its wonted sternness, his hard features assumed an expression of calmness and gentleness. He adapted himself to the cross to make the negroes' work easier, and looking directly into heaven, began to pray fervently. It seemed as if he did not feel the nails driven into his flesh,—not a tremor, not a sign of pain was seen on his face. He prayed when he was nailed to the cross, he prayed when the cross was raised; and only when the cries and jeers of the crowd began to fill the amphitheatre did the old man show signs of concern. His brow frowned somewhat, as if angered at the pagans for violating the calm and sweetness of his death.

The arena looked like a forest with people crucified on the trees. The sun's rays beat on the arms of the crosses and the heads of the crucified. On the arena deep shadows fantastically checkered fell on the yellow sand. The delight of the audience consisted in looking at a lingering death. Never before was there such a large number of crosses. The women were placed on the edges, and Crispus, as teacher of the faith, was placed immediately opposite Cæsar's podium, on a large cross stuck in the centre of a circle of grass. No one of the victims had died yet, but some of them had fainted. The heads of some hung on their breasts, while others leaned them on their shoulders, but not a word was uttered by any one, save in prayer. There was something terrible in that forest of crosses, in those crucified bodies, in the silence of the victims. The crowd, entering with cries and jeers, was now silent, and did not know what to think, or on whom to look first. The nudity of female bodies ceased to rouse their passions.

No one offered to bet on who would die first, as was the case when only a few condemned were in the arena. It seemed as if Cæsar was uncomfortable from ennui, for his face was drowsy, and he lazily arranged his necklace.

At this time, Crispus, whose eyes were hitherto closed, like those of a dying man, opened them and looked at Cæsar. His face assumed an expression so pitiless, his

glance was so fierce, that the Augustians began to whisper into each other's ears; and finally the attention of Cæsar himself was attracted, and he placed his emerald to his eye.

Perfect silence followed. All eyes were fixed on Crispus, who attempted to move his right hand, as if to tear it from the beam. In a moment his breast began to strain, his ribs stood out, and he cried:

"Matricide! Woe to thee!"

The Augustians, hearing the deadly insult to the ruler of the world, dared not breathe. Chilo was entirely frigid. Cæsar shuddered and the emerald fell from his hand. The voice of Crispus rose higher and higher in the amphitheatre,—

"Woe to thee, murderer of wife and brother! Woe to thee, anti-christ! The abyss is opening under thy feet, death stretches its hand to thee, and the tomb is awaiting thee. Woe to thee, living corpse, for thou shalt die in terror, and wilt be condemned for aye!"

Unable to tear away his hand from the cross, crucified, terrible, and resembling a skeleton, as implacable as predestination, Crispus shook his white beard over Nero's podium, and from the movement a shower of rose-leaves fell on the sand.

"Woe to thee, murderer! Thy measure is overflowing, and thy hour is at hand!"

He strained again. It seemed that he would release his hand from the cross, and menacingly shake it at Cæsar; but suddenly his arms extended even more, his body settled down, his head fell on his breast, and Crispus expired.

In that forest of crosses, the weaker ones began also the sleep of eternity.

CHAPTER XIV.

"MASTER," said Chilo, "the sea is as smooth as oil, and the waves seem to sleep. Let us go to Achæa. There the glory of Apollo is awaiting thee, crowns and triumphs are awaiting thee; there the people will deify thee, and the gods will receive thee as one of their own; but here, master"—

And he stopped, for his lower lip began to tremble so violently that his words passed into meaningless whisper.

"We will go when the games are over," answered Nero.

"I know that even now some people call the Christians *innocia corpora*. If I were to go, all would repeat it. What dost thou fear, worm-eaten mushroom?"

Nero cast a searching glance at Chilo, as if expecting him to offer explanations, for his calmness was only feigned. At the last performance he was himself frightened at the words of Crispus, and returning home, he could not fall asleep, partly from anger and shame, and partly from fear. The superstitious Vestinius, who was silently listening to their conversation, looked around, and mysteriously said,—

"Master, listen to this old man. There is something strange in the Christians. Their Deity gives them an easy death, but He may avenge them."

"It was not I who arranged the games, but Tigellinus."

"Yes, it was I," said Tigellinus, who had overheard Cæsar's answer. "It was I, and I laugh at all the Christian gods. Lord, Vestinius is a bubble, filled with superstitions, and the valiant Greek is ready to die of fear at sight of a hen defending its chickens."

"True," said Nero; "but give command that henceforth the tongues of Christians be cut or their mouths be stopped."

"Divine Cæsar, fire will stop them."

"Woe is me!" moaned Chilo.

The insolent confidence of Tigellinus gave courage to Cæsar, and he laughed as he pointed to the old Greek and said:

"Look at the descendant of Achilles!"

Indeed Chilo was a terrible sight. The remnant of hair on his head had turned white, an expression of immense dread and oppression was fixed on his face. At times he looked like one stunned by something, often did not hear questions put to him, at other times he would boil with anger, and became so insolent that the Augustians preferred to let him alone. In such a mood he was at that moment.

"Do with me what you please, but I shall not go again to the games!" he exclaimed violently, snapping his fingers. Nero looked at him for a moment, then said to Tigellinus:

"See that this Stoic is near me in the gardens. I wish to see what impression our torches will have on him."

Chilo was frightened at the threat these words were pregnant with.

"Lord," said he, "I do not see anything in the night-time."

"The night will be as bright as day," said Cæsar, with a terrible smile, and began a conversation with other Augustians about the horse-races he intended to have when the games were over.

Petronius approached Chilo, and slapping him on the back, said:

"Have I not said that thou wouldst not hold out?"

"I wish to drink," said Chilo; and he stretched his trembling hand to get a goblet of wine, but was unable to raise it to his lips. Vestinius helped him to raise the goblet and with frightened face asked,—

"Art thou pursued by the Furies?"

The old Greek looked at Vestinius, as if not understanding him, and only blinked his eyes. Vestinius repeated,—

"Art thou pursued by the Furies?"

"No," answered Chilo, "but night is spreading before me."

"What, night? May the gods have mercy on thee. Night, thou sayest?"

"Night, terrible and impenetrable, in which I see something approaching me; but I know not what, and I am terrified."

"I have always thought that they were sorcerers. Dost thou dream of something?"

"No, for I do not sleep. I did not think that they would be punished thus."

"Art thou sorry for them?"

"Why do ye shed so much blood? Thou hast heard what that old man said from the cross? Woe to us!"

"I heard," said Vestinius, in a low voice. "But they are incendiaries."

"Not true!"

"And enemies of mankind."

"Not true!"

"They poison the water."

"Not true!"

"They kill children."

"Not true!"

"How?" asked Vestinius, in wonder. "Thou hast said so thyself and given them into the hands of Tigellinus."

"Therefore night has surrounded me, and death is approaching toward me. I sometimes think that I am dead already, and ye also."

"No! It is they who are dying; we are living. But tell me what do they see when they are dying?"

"Christ."

"Is that their god? And is he a mighty god?"

But Chilo answered by a question,—

"What kind of torches will they burn in the gardens? Hast thou heard what Cæsar said?"

"I heard and know. Those torches are called Sarmenitii and Semaxii. They will be dressed in tunics of distress, steeped in pitch, and tied to posts which will be set on fire. I hope their god will not send on the city new misfortunes. Semaxii! What a dreadful punishment!"

"I would rather see that," said Chilo; "for there will not be blood. Command the slave to put a goblet of wine to my lips. I wish to drink, but my hand trembles from age."

Other Augustians were also speaking of the Christians. Old Domitius Afer reviled them.

"There are such a great number of them," he said, "that they might raise a civil war. Ye remember their resistance was feared. But they die like sheep."

"Let them try to resist!" said Tigellinus.

To this Petronius answered:

"Ye deceive yourself. They are armed."

"With what?"

"With patience."

"That is a new kind of weapon."

"True. But can ye say that they die like ordinary criminals? No! They die as if the criminals were those who condemn them to death,—that is, we and the whole Roman people."

"What absurdity!" exclaimed Tigellinus.

"Hic Abdera!"* answered Petronius.

Other Augustians, struck by the well-aimed remark, began to exchange glances, and repeat,—

"True! There is something peculiar in their death."

"I tell you that they see their divinity!" cried Vestinius.

Some Augustians turned to Chilo,—

"Old man, thou knowest them well; tell us what they see."

The Greek spat out the wine on his tunic, and answered,—

"The resurrection!" And he began to tremble so that those sitting around him burst into loud laughter.

* Literally: "There is Abdera." Abdera was a city in Thracia, whose inhabitants were considered very dull. Hence, the meaning is, "What a dullard!"

CHAPTER XV.

THREE nights in succession Vinicius had remained away from home. Petronius thought that perhaps he had devised a new plan, and was attempting to free Lygia from the Esquiline dungeon, but did not wish to inquire about anything, lest he might frustrate it. This exquisite skeptic had become somewhat superstitious, or rather, since his failure to rescue Lygia from the Mamertine prison, he ceased to have faith in his star.

Besides, he did not believe that the present efforts of Vinicius would be successful. The Esquiline prison, hastily constructed from the cellars of the houses destroyed by the fire, was not, it is true, so terrible as the old Tullianum, but it was better guarded. Petronius understood very well that she was transferred in order that she might not die there and escape the amphitheatre. He could easily conceive that she would be guarded as one guards the eye in his head.

"It is obvious," he said to himself, "that Cæsar and Tigellinus have destined her for some terrible spectacle, and that Vinicius will perish in his attempt to rescue her."

Vinicius himself lost all hope of liberating Lygia. Christ alone could do it now. The young tribune was only anxious to see her in prison. The thought occurred to him that he might be able to effect an entrance as a laborer who carries out the corpses. "Nazarius penetrated the Mamertine prison in that manner," he thought, and decided on an attempt.

The overseer of the "Putrid Pits," bribed by a large sum, finally admitted him as one of his laborers whose duty it was to nightly clear the dungeon of its corpses. The danger of being recognized was insignificant, in view of his slave costume, the night, and the dim light of the prison. Besides, who would suspect that a patrician would expose himself to the noxious smells of the foul prison, and do work which only slaves or the very poorest were compelled to do.

When the desired evening came, Vinicius gladly girdled

his loins, wrapped his head in a rag steeped in turpentine, and with beating heart betook himself, with other laborers to the Esquiline.

They met with no obstacle from the pretorian guards, for they were all provided with proper "*tesseræ*," which the centurion examined by the light of a lamp. Immediately the large iron gates were opened, and the laborers entered.

Vinicius saw before him an immense vaulted cellar, which was connected with rows of similar cellars. Rush-candles illuminated groups of people. Some lay near the wall, sleeping, or, perhaps, dead; others surrounded large vessels of water from which they drank like people stricken with fever. Children slept in the embrace of their mothers. All around were heard groans, the quick breathing of sick people, sobs, curses and whispered prayers. The odor of corpses was rank. Dark figures flitted by the walls, and nearer the lights were seen pale, frightened, and hungry faces, with eyes dim, or flaming with fever, with lips turned blue, and perspiration streaming down their foreheads. In the corners loud ravings of the sick, begging for water, imploring for death, pierced the comparative silence. And still that prison was less terrible than the old Tullianum. Vinicius grew faint, and breathed with difficulty. When he thought that Lygia was amid this misery and horror, his hair stood on end, the cry of despair was stifled in his breast. The amphitheatre, the roar of the wild beasts, the crosses could not compare with this terrible dungeon in which the imploring voices of people repeated from all corners,—

"Lead us to death!"

Vinicius buried his nails into his palms, feeling that he was growing weak, and that his presence of mind was forsaking him. All his feelings, all his grief turned into a desire for death.

The overseer of the "*Putrid Pits*," turning to the jailer, asked,—

"How many corpses have ye to-day?"

"About a dozen, but there will be more before morning; there, at the wall some are beginning to get hoarse."

And he began to complain that the women concealed their dead children, in order the longer to keep them from the "*Putrid Pits*." The corpses could only be recognized by their smell, and the air, already horrible, was spoiled still

more. "I would rather be a slave in an obscure *ærgastulum* than guard these dogs rotting here while alive."

Vinicius meanwhile came to, and began to look around. He feared he might not see Lygia. The cellars were connected by crude, hastily made passages, and the laborers went only into those from which corpses were to be carried out. Vinicius was seized with fear that all his labors might be in vain.

Luckily his patron came to his aid.

"The corpses must be carried out now, or ye together with the prisoners will die of infection spread by the corpses."

"There are only ten of us for all the cellars," answered the jailer, "and we must sleep sometimes."

"Then I will leave four of my men, who at night will go through the cellars."

"The corpses must be inspected; an order came that their throats must be cut before they are thrown into the pits."

The overseer selected four men, among them Vinicius, and went with the others to pile the corpses on the stretchers.

Vinicius began to breathe more freely. He was satisfied that he would now find Lygia. He looked through all the dark corners of the first dungeon, then the second and the third, but his search was fruitless. It was late, the corpses had been carried out; here and there in the corridors between the cellars was heard the cry of weary and hungry children, a whispered prayer, moans, the death rattle of the dying. He entered the fourth cellar, raised the light, and began to search.

He shuddered. He thought that behind a grating fastened to the wall, he saw the large form of Ursus. Putting out the light, he approached the grating, and asked:

"Ursus, art thou here?"

The giant turned his head to Vinicius.

"Who art thou?"

"Dost not know me?" asked the young man.

"Thou hast put out the light; how could I know thee?"

Vinicius at this moment noticed Lygia lying on a mantle near the wall, and without a word he sank beside her on his knees. Ursus recognized him, and said,—

"Praise be to Christ! But do not wake her, master."

Vinicius gazed at her through his tears. In spite of the partial darkness that prevailed there, he distinguished

Lygia's face, which seemed to him as pale as alabaster, and her emaciated arms. He was seized by a love, which was like an insufferable pain, a love which stirred his soul to its uttermost depth, and which is at the same time so full of pity, and of fealty that he fell with his face to the ground, and began to kiss the hem of the mantle on which rested to him the dearest being in the world.

Ursus looked at Vinicius for a long time in silence, but finally he touched his tunic.

"Master," he asked, "how didst thou come here, and didst thou come to save her?"

Vinicius raised himself, and for another moment struggled with his emotion.

"Show me a way!" he said.

"Master, I thought that thou wouldst find one. I only thought of one."

He looked through the grating, and then as if justifying himself, added:

"That way—but there are soldiers outside."

"A hundred pretorians," answered Vinicius.

"Then we cannot pass?"

"No!"

The Lygian rubbed his forehead, and again asked how he came in, and Vinicius told him of the tessera which he held from the overseer. Vinicius suddenly stopped, as if some happy thought crossed his mind.

"By the torments of the Redeemer!" he said, quickly, "I will remain here, and she will take my tessera, put on the cloak, and wrap her head in a rag, and walk out. Among the slaves there are many youths, and the pretorians will not recognize her. Once in the house of Petronius, she will be safe."

But the Lygian hung his head on his breast, and answered:

"She would not consent to it, because she loves thee. Besides, she is sick and cannot raise herself." In a moment he added:

"Master, if thou and the noble Petronius could not release her from the dungeon, who could?"

"Christ alone!"

"He could help all," thought the simple-minded Lygian, "but if He does not do it, then the hour of torture and death must have arrived." He was reconciled to it, but it pained him to think of the condemned child, who had grown

up on his arms, and whom he loved more than his own life.

Vinicius again kneeled before Lygia. The moonlight stole in through the grated opening in the vault, and threw a stronger light on the group than the rush-candle afforded. Lygia opened her eyes, and placing her feverish hand into that of Vinicius, said:

"I see thee, and I knew that thou wouldst come."

Vinicius caught her hands and pressed them to his forehead and his heart, then he raised her and held her to his breast.

"I have come, dearest. May Christ spare and guard thee."

"I am sick, Marcus," said Lygia, "and must die,—here or on the arena. I prayed that I might see thee before death, and thou hast come,—Christ has heard me."

Vinicius could not speak, he kept her at his breast; and she continued:

"I saw thee from the window of the Tullianum, and knew that thou wished to come. And now the Redeemer has given me a moment of consciousness so that we may take farewell of each other. Marcus, I am going to Him, but I love thee, and shall love thee always."

Vinicius overmastered his feelings, stifled his pain, and began to speak in pretended calmness,—

"No, dearest, thou wilt not die. The Apostle commanded me to believe, and promised to pray for thee,—and he knew Christ. Christ loves him, and will not refuse him anything. If thou hadst to die, Peter would not have told me to hope. No, Lygia, Christ will have pity on me. He does not wish thee to die. He will not permit it. I swear to thee by the Redeemer that Peter is praying for thee."

The only candle which was flickering, went out, but the moonbeams came in a flood through the grated opening. The groan of a child was heard, and then it ceased. From without came the voices of the pretorians, who, after making their customary rounds, played at *scriptæ duodecim*.

"O, Marcus," answered Lygia, "Christ himself called to His Father, 'Remove this bitter cup from Me,' but He had to drink it. Christ Himself died on the cross, and now thousands are perishing for His sake,—why then should He spare me alone? Who am I, Marcus? I heard Peter say that he, too, will die in torments; and who am I compared with him? When the pretorians came to us, I feared tor-

ture and death ; but now I fear no more. See how terrible this dungeon is, but I am going to heaven. Remember that here there is Cæsar ; but there is the Redeemer, kind and merciful. And there is no death. Thou lovest me,—think then how happy I shall be. O, Marcus, dearest, think that thou wilt come to see me there.”

She stopped to take breath, then raised his hand to her lips.

“ Marcus ! ”

“ What, dearest ? ”

“ Do not weep, and remember that thou wilt come to me. I did not live long, but God gave me thy soul. And I wish to tell Christ that though I died, that though thou didst look on my death, though I left thee in grief, thou didst not complain, and always lovest Him. And thou wilt love Him, and patiently endure my death. For He will unite us, and I love thee and wish to be with thee.”

Her breath again failed her, and in a scarcely audible voice she finished,—

“ Promise me, Marcus ! ”

Vinicius embraced her with his trembling hands, and answered :

“ I swear by thy sacred head ! I promise ! ”

The face of Lygia became radiant in the dull light of the moon. Again she placed his hand to her lips, and whispered,—

“ I am thy wife ! ”

CHAPTER XVI.

FOR three days, or rather three nights, nothing interrupted the peace of Vinicius and Lygia. When the customary work was done, when the dead were removed from the living, the sick from the hale ; when the tired jailers lay down to sleep, Vinicius came into Lygia’s vault, and remained there until dawn. She laid her head on his breast, and they talked of love and of death. Both, involuntarily, in their thoughts and conversations, even in their wishes and hopes, were being estranged from life and lost consciousness of it. Both were like people who have sailed away in a boat, and losing sight of the mainland, were gradually drifting into infinity. Both were gradually turning into

melancholy spirits, loving each other, loving Christ, and ready to fly away. Only at times anguish stirred his heart like a whirlwind, and hope, born of love and faith in the crucified God, flashed upon him like a lightning shaft. But he, too, daily drifted away from the earth, and resignedly awaited death. When in the morning he left the vault, he looked on the world, on the city, on his acquaintances, and on life as through a dream. Everything seemed to him strange, distant, insignificant, perishable, and fleeting. He even ceased to be moved by the ferocity of the tortures he saw daily. Through them one might pass in forgetfulness, with thoughts bent and eyes fixed on another thing. It seemed to him and Lygia that they were getting into the embrace of eternity. They talked of love, of how they would love each other, and live together, but on the other side of the tomb; and if their thoughts turned toward things earthly, they were such as people, preparing for a long journey, give to preparations for the same. They were finally surrounded by such stillness as surrounds two columns, amid ruin, neglect and oblivion. Their only care was that Christ should not separate them, and as the conviction that He would not, momentarily grew in them, they loved Him as a link that would unite them in eternal bliss and peace. While still on earth they felt the mortal dust fall from them. Their souls became as pure as a tear. Under threat of death, amid misfortune and suffering, in that offensive dungeon, they began to see heaven,—for Lygia took him by the hand, as if she were safe and sainted, and led him to the eternal source of happiness,—life.

Petronius, when he noticed the increasing calmness and lucidity in Vinicius's face, was perplexed. At times he even thought that Vinicius had found a new mode of rescuing the girl, and he felt slighted because Vinicius would not initiate him into the secret. He could not restrain himself, and finally asked:

"Thou hast changed, Vinicius. Do not keep the secret from me; I wish to and can help thee. Hast thou devised anything?"

"I have," answered Vinicius; "but thou canst not help me. After her death I will declare that I am a Christian, and follow her."

"Then thou hast no hope?"

"Yes, I have. Christ will give her to me, and will never separate us."



A SUPPRESSED MURMUR RAN THROUGH THE
WHOLE ASSEMBLY.

Petronius began to pace to and fro in the atrium, with an expression of disappointment and discontent on his face.

"Your Christ is not needed for this,—our Thanatos could render the same service," he said.

"No, friend," said Vinicius, sadly smiling; "but thou art not willing to understand it."

"I will not, and cannot," said Petronius. "There is no time for conversation. Thou rememberest what I said when we failed to rescue her from the Tullianum? I had lost all hope, but thou didst say when we returned home, 'I believe that Christ can restore her to me.' Let him restore her. If I throw a valuable vase into the sea, not one of our gods will restore it to me; but if yours is no better, why should he be honored more than the old ones?"

"He will restore her to me," said Vinicius.

Petronius shrugged his shoulders.

"And knowest thou that the Christians will light up to-morrow the gardens of Cæsar?"

"To-morrow?" repeated Vinicius. And in the face of the terrible reality his heart trembled with pain and horror. He thought that this might be the last night of his meeting with Lygia, and, bidding farewell to Petronius, he went hastily to the overseer of the "Puticuli" for his tessera. But disappointment awaited him there, for he was refused the tessera.

"Pardon me, lord," he said. "I have done what I could for thee, but I cannot subject my life to further danger. To-night the Christians will be taken to the gardens of Cæsar. There will be a great many soldiers and functionaries in the prison. Shouldst thou be recognized, I and my children would be lost."

Vinicius understood that all his prayers would be in vain. The idea came to him that the soldiers, who had seen him before, might pass him without a sign; so, toward evening he dressed himself in the old garb of tunic and rag, and betook himself to the door of the prison.

But that day the tesserae were verified with greater care than usual. Worse yet: the centurion Scevinus, a strict soldier, devoted body and soul to Cæsar, recognized Vinicius.

But apparently in the ironclad breast of the soldier there smouldered a spark of compassion for human misfortune; for he, instead of striking the shield with his spear, which

was their way of sounding an alarm, he took Vinicius aside, and said:

"Return home, master. I recognized thee, but I will be silent, for I wish not to ruin thee. I cannot admit thee. Return home, and may the gods send thee peace."

"Thou canst not admit me," said Vinicius, "but permit me to stand here and look at the people who will be led forth."

"I was not commanded to prevent that," said the centurion.

Vinicius stood at the door and waited for the appearance of the condemned. Finally, near midnight, the door of the prison was opened. Whole ranks of prisoners, men, women and children, appeared, surrounded by armed pretorians. The night was so clear that, not only the figures, but also the faces of the unfortunate could be distinguished. They walked in pairs, forming a long, sad chain. Their number was so great, that it seemed that all the vaults would be emptied. The quiet of the night was only interrupted by the rhythmical clatter of the soldiers' weapons.

In the rear of the procession Vinicius clearly saw the physician Glaucus, but Lygia and Ursus were not among the condemned.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was not dark yet when the first waves of people began to flow into Caesar's gardens. The crowds in holiday attire, crowned with garlands, eager, singing, and partly drunk, were coming to witness a magnificent spectacle. Cries of *Semaxii! Sarmentitii!* were heard on the *Via Testa*, on the bridge of *Æmilius*, on the *Triumphal Way*, and along the *Vatican hill*. This was not the first exhibition of human torches, but never before was there seen such a large number of people burning on poles. *Cæsar* and *Tigellinus*, desiring to be done with the Christians and with the infection which was spreading through the city from the prisons, ordered all the vaults cleared of the condemned, except a few dozens intended as a finale. As the crowds entered the gardens they were struck with amazement. All the alleys, squares, paths around the ponds were filled with poles covered with pitch, to which Chris-

tians were fastened. The poles stretched up the hills and down the dales so far that the farthest looked like spears stuck in the ground. The number of the condemned exceeded all expectations of the crowd. It seemed as though some one had fastened an entire people to the poles for the edification of Cæsar and Rome. Small throngs of spectators gathered around some of the poles, according as their curiosity was roused by the figure, sex or age of the victim; they looked at their faces, the flowers, the garlands of ivy, then went further, exchanging curious glances and questions: "Is it possible that so many are guilty? Could children who can hardly walk unaided have been the incendiaries?" And doubt, little by little, passed into alarm.

Meanwhile darkness came, and the first stars began to twinkle in the sky. Beside each condemned stood a slave with a burning torch in his hand, and when the trumpets sounded, each slave applied his torches to the foot of a pillar. The straw, hidden under flowers and steeped in pitch, flamed up at once with a bright fire, which, increasing every moment, began to untwine the ivy, and rising, embraced the feet of the victims. The crowds grew silent, but the gardens resounded with loud groans and cries of pain. Among the Christians were such that raised their heads to the starry sky and began to praise Christ. The people listened, but even the hardset hearts were filled with terror when from the smaller pillars came the heartrending voices of children: "Mamma! mamma!" Even the drunken spectators shuddered at the sight of these little heads and innocent faces distorted with pain, and choking, in the surrounding smoke. And the fire rose higher and higher consuming the garlands of roses and ivy. The alleys were lit up, as were the clusters of trees, the lawns and flowery patches, the ponds and the trembling roses on the trees. In short it was as bright as day. The odor of burning flesh filled the gardens, but the slaves threw into the censers handfuls of myrrh and aloe. In the crowds were heard cries, but whether of sympathy or joy was not known. The flames rose still higher, reaching the breasts of the victims, heating their breath, and curling their hair, covered their blackened faces with a curtain of smoke, and rose higher and higher as if in triumph of the victory of the power which commanded to rouse it.

At the beginning of the spectacle Cæsar appeared among the crowds in a magnificent quadriga, attired in the cos-

tume of a charioteer, in color of the Greens, to which he belonged at court. He was followed by other chariots filled with courtiers in bright array, senators, priests and naked bacchantes with garlands on their heads and vessels of wine in their hands, noisy and drunk. Around them were musicians, dressed like fawns and satyrs, playing on citharæ, formingæ, flutes and horns. Other chariots contained matrons and maidens, equally drunk, and stripped to the waist. The whole brilliant procession moved along the broadest alley, shouting, "Evoe!" Cæsar, who was with Tigellinus and Chilo, whose terror sincerely amused him, himself held the reins. The horses were walking slowly, and Cæsar looked at the burning bodies, but at the same time, listened to the shouts of the crowd. Standing erect on his golden quadriga, and surrounded by a dense crowd of courtiers and others, he looked like a giant. His malformed hands, holding the reins, seemed to bless the people; his face and half-opened eyes were lighted up by a smile. He shone above the people like a sun, a deity, terrible, but grand and powerful. At times he stopped to look closer at some victim, and then continued on his way, followed by an insane suite. Now he bowed to the people; now he leaned back and spoke to Tigellinus. He finally reached the great fountain, where the two main alleys forked, and stepping from the chariot, he nodded to his suite and mingled with the crowd.

He was greeted with shouts and plaudits. The bacchantes, the nymphs, the senators, priests, fawns, satyrs and soldiers formed a mad circle around him; and Cæsar, with Tigellinus on one side and Chilo on the other, walked around the fountain, and made remarks about the victims, and heartily laughed at the old Greek, whose face was the picture of despair.

They finally stopped before a lofty torch, ornamented with myrtle and dodder of thymæ. The flaming tongues licked the knees of the victim, but its face was not seen on account of the smoke that wound around the figure. The light night breeze after a while turned away the smoke, and disclosed the grey head of an old man falling on his breast.

At sight of him Chilo rolled into a ball like a wounded reptile, and from his lips came a cry that sounded more like croaking than a human voice:

"Glaucus! Glaucus!"

He was alive yet. His suffering face was inclined as if

to take a last look on his executioner, whose crimes against him were forgiven in the name of Christ, and who again handed him to the torturers. Never has man dealt so terribly with another. And now the victim was burning, and the executioner stood at his feet. The eyes of Glaucus were fixed on Chilo. Chilo rose to run away, but his feet would not serve him, and some unseen hand with superhuman strength held him fast to the spot. Chilo was petrified. He felt something surging within him, overwhelming him; he saw everything surrounding him disappear—Cæsar, the courtiers and the crowd, and a dreadful, endless, black desert was opening before him, and the eyes of the martyr were staring at him, and calling him to judgment. Glaucus inclined his head still more, and still gazed at Chilo. Those present understood that something was taking place between the two. The laughter froze on their lips when they looked on the face of Chilo; it was terribly contorted with pain and suffering as if the flaming tongues were licking his own body. All at once he staggered, raised his hands, and cried in a piercing voice :

“Glaucus, in the name of Christ, forgive me!”

Everybody was silent, Cæsar and his courtiers shuddered, and they all involuntarily raised their eyes.

The head of the martyr moved, and from the top of the torch the voice resembling a moan was heard,—

“I forgive!”

Chilo fell to the ground, and, howling like a wild beast, began throwing earth on his head. The flames rose higher, embraced Glaucus’s breast and face, the myrtle crown on his head crackled, and the whole pillar was on fire.

Chilo rose, but he was no more recognized by the Augustians, to such an extent had his face changed. His eyes flashed with an uncommon light, his wrinkled brow was lighted by inspiration. Helpless a moment ago, the Greek now looked like some priest, who under a divine inspiration is ready to reveal a profound mystery.

“What is the matter? Has he gone mad?” asked several voices.

Chilo turned to the crowd, and raising his right hand, spoke, or rather cried in a voice so loud that even those who stood behind the circle of courtiers heard him,—

“People of Rome! I swear to you by my death, that those people perishing in the fire are innocent. That is the incendiary!”

And he pointed his finger at Nero.

The courtiers were stupefied. Chilo still stood with outstretched, trembling hand, and pointed at Cæsar. Suddenly the wildest confusion prevailed. The people moved like a wave toward the old man, to get a closer view of him. Cries were heard, "Hold!" "Woe to us!" Cat-calls and exclamations came thick and fast: "Ahenobarbus! Matricide! Incendiary!" The confusion was growing. The bacchantes furiously vociferated, and hid in the chariots. Suddenly some pillars collapsed, sending a cloud of burning cinders over the heads of the crowd, making the confusion more chaotic. The blind, compact crowd lifted Chilo from his feet, and bore him to the depth of the garden.

Other pillars came tumbling to the ground, filling the alleys with smoke and the odor of burned flesh. The alarmed, gloomy crowds began to press toward the gates. The news of the incident, exaggerated, distorted, and embellished, flashed through the crowd. Some said that Cæsar had fainted; others, that he had confessed that he had given command to burn Rome; others, that he was taken seriously ill; and still others, that he had been borne away dead in a chariot. Here and there words of compassion for the Christians were heard. "It was not they who burned Rome; why spill so much blood; why so many tortures, so much injustice? Will not the gods avenge the innocent? And what 'piacula' will propitiate them?" "Innoxia corpora," were heard oftener. Women loudly expressed pity for the children. Finally pity turned to curses on Cæsar and Tigellinus. But there were also such who asked themselves and others: "What kind of divinity is that which gives its adherents the strength to bear tortures and face death with such calmness?" And they thoughtfully returned to their homes.

Chilo wandered in the gardens, not knowing where to go. He again felt the decrepitude of old age; now he stumbled against a charred body, now he struck a burned pillar, which sent a cloud of cinders after him, and again he sat down and looked in bewilderment around him. Night reigned in the gardens. The pale moon shone with uncertain light through the branches of the trees, and the old Greek thought that he saw in the moon the face of Glaucus, and that the eyes of the dead martyr were staring at him, and he hid before the light. Finally, as if impelled by some

unknown force, he turned toward the fountain where Glaucus had breathed his last.

Some hand touched his shoulder.

The old man turned, and seeing a strange figure, exclaimed with terror,—

“Who art thou?”

“The Apostle, Paul of Tarsus.”

“I am accursed!—what dost thou wish?”

“I wish to save thee,” answered the Apostle.

Chilo supported himself against a tree. His legs bent under him, and his arms hung like two lifeless stumps.

“For me there is no salvation,” he said, gloomily.

“Thou hast heard how God forgave the thief, who repented on the cross?” asked Paul.

“And knowest thou what I have done?”

“I saw thy contrition, and heard how thou didst testify to the truth.”

“O Lord!”

“And if a servant of Christ forgave thee in the hour of torture and death, why should Christ not forgive thee?”

Chilo seized his head with both hands, like a madman.

“Forgiveness! for me, forgiveness!”

“Our God is a merciful God,” answered Paul.

“For me?” repeated Chilo.

And he began to groan like a man who had not the strength to control his suffering and grief.

“Lean on me,” said Paul, “and go with me.”

And they went along the alleys guided by the splashing of the fountain, which, in the silence of the night seemed to be wailing over the corpses of the martyrs.

“Our God is a God of mercy,” repeated Paul. “Couldst thou fill the depths of the sea by throwing in pebbles? I tell thee that the mercy of Christ is as the sea, and the crimes of men will sink in it as a pebble in the abyss. I tell thee that His mercy is as the sky, which covers the mountains, lands, and seas, and it spreads over all, and has no limit. Thou hast suffered at the pillar of Glaucus, and Christ saw thy suffering. Thou didst say, disregarding what may happen to-morrow, ‘That is the incendiary!’ and Christ remembers thy words. Thy malice and falsehood are gone, and in thy heart there is only great compassion left. Come with me, and hear what I will say. I also hated Him, and persecuted His chosen ones. I did not believe in Him, and did not want Him till He made Himself

manifest to me, and called me. And since that day I love Him. He has now visited thee with compunction, with alarm, and with grief to call thee to Himself. Thou didst hate Him, but He loved thee; thou didst deliver His servants to torture, but He wishes to forgive and save thee."

The unfortunate old man shook with sobbing, which rent his soul, but Paul mastered him, and led him away, as a soldier leads a captive.

After a while the Apostle continued,—

"Come with me, and I will lead thee to Him. I came for nothing else to thee. He commanded me to gather the souls of men in the name of love, and I am fulfilling His command. Thou dost think thyself accursed, but I say to thee: Believe in Him, and thou shalt be saved. Thou thinkest thyself hated by Him, but I say: He loves thee. In Him alone is our refuge; He alone will weigh thy sorrow, see thy misery, remove thy alarm, and raise thee to Himself."

He led the penitent to the fountain, the silver streams of which gleamed in the moonlight. Quiet reigned all around; the slaves had removed the pillars and the bodies of the martyrs.

With a moan Chilo sank to his knees, and covering his face with his hands, remained motionless. Paul raised his eyes to heaven, and began to pray.

"Lord! Behold this sufferer, his grief, his tears, and his tortures! O merciful God, who hast shed Thy blood for our sins,—for the sake of Thy torment, for the sake of Thy death and resurrection, forgive him!"

He became silent, but looked toward heaven, and prayed.

From under his feet came a cry which resembled a moan,—

"O Christ! O Christ, forgive me!"

Paul took some water from the fountain on his palm, and, turning to the kneeling old man, said:

"Chilo! I baptize thee in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit! Amen!"

Chilo raised his head, but was motionless. The moon cast a bright light on his white hair and his deathly pale and stony face. The moments were fleeting. From the large aviaries in the gardens of Domitius came the crowing of cocks; but Chilo remained kneeling like a statue on a monument. At last he recovered, and, raising himself, said:

"What must I do before death, master?"

Paul, who was wrapped up in contemplation of that mysterious power against which even such souls as that of the Greek could not withstand, also recovered, and answered:

"Have faith, and bear witness to the truth."

They walked out together. At the gate the Apostle again blessed the old man, and, at the request of Chilo, they parted. He knew that after what had happened, Cæsar and Tigellinus would persecute him.

And he was not mistaken. His house was surrounded by pretorians, who seized him, and under the leadership of Scevinus he was taken to the Palatine.

Cæsar retired to rest himself, but Tigellinus was awake, and, seeing the wretched Greek, turned toward him with calm but ominous face.

"Thou hast committed a crime; hast insulted the majesty of Cæsar," he said, "and thou shalt not escape punishment. If to-morrow thou declare in the amphitheatre that thou wert drunk and mad, that the Christians were guilty of the fire, thy punishment will be limited to a sound beating and exile."

"I cannot do that, master," answered Chilo.

Tigellinus approached him with slow step, and asked in a calm but terrible voice:

"Why canst not, thou Greek cur? Dost not know that thou wert drunk? And dost not know what is awaiting thee? Look then!"

And he pointed to a corner of the atrium, in the dark depth of which stood four Thracian slaves, with ropes and pincers in their hands.

But Chilo answered:

"I cannot, master!"

Tigellinus was getting furious, but he restrained himself.

"Dost thou wish to die like the Christians?"

The old man raised his pale face; his lips moved speechlessly for a while, then he said:

"I too believe in Christ."

Tigellinus looked at him in wonder.

"Dog, thou art mad!"

And he gave vent to his pent-up anger. Springing at Chilo, he caught his beard in both hands, threw him on the ground, trampled him, crying with foam on his lips,—

"Thou wilt retract! Thou wilt!"

"I cannot!" answered Chilo.

"Then take him!"

At this command the Thracians seized the old man, tied him to the bench, and began to squeeze his hip. When he was bound, Chilo kissed the hands of the Thracians, then he closed his eyes. He seemed to be dead.

He was alive, however, for when Tigellinus bent over him, and asked a second time, "Wilt thou retract?" the pale lips of Chilo slightly moved, and he answered in a low whisper,—

"I—I cannot."

Tigellinus commanded to stop the torture, and began to walk up and down in the atrium, his face blanched with anger and confusion. Finally, a new idea came to his head, and he turned to the Thracians and said,—

"Tear out his tongue!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE drama "*Aureolus*," which was to be given after the spectacles in the gardens, was not prepared with the usual elaboration. It was only sought to make room for as large a number of people as possible. The rôle of the bear in the performance was this time to be performed by a live brute. This was a new idea of Tigellinus. Cæsar at first refused to be present, but on the advice of his favorite, he changed his determination. Tigellinus explained that it was necessary, after what had happened, to show himself to the populace, and he guaranteed that the crucified slave on the stage would not insult him as had Crispus.

The people were already sated with blood-spilling, so lottery tickets and gifts were to be distributed, and a feast was promised in the illuminated amphitheatre.

At dusk the amphitheatre was already crowded. The Augustians, headed by Tigellinus, came not so much to see the spectacle, as to show their loyalty to Cæsar, and to talk of Chilo, who was the subject of conversation throughout Rome.

Rumor had it that Cæsar had gone mad, and could not sleep, that he was seized with fear, and saw dreadful apparitions, and that therefore he was preparing to go to Achæa. Some contradicted it, saying that now he would be more pitiless toward the Christians. There was no lack of cowards, however, who predicted that the accusation which

Chilo had thrown in the face of Cæsar would have most serious consequences. There were also such who begged Tigellinus to put an end to the persecutions, in the name of humanity.

"See whither ye are going," said Barcus Soranus. "Ye wish to satisfy the craving of the people for revenge, and to convince them that the punishment was falling on the guilty, but the result is just the opposite."

"True!" added Antistius Verus. "They all whisper now that the Christians are innocent. If this proves foresight, Chilo was right when he said that your brains will not fill a nutshell."

Tigellinus turned to them and said:

"People whisper also that thy daughter Servilia secreted her Christian slaves from Cæsar's justice, Barcus Soranus; and thy wife is charged with the same, Antistius."

"That is not true!" exclaimed the frightened Barcus.

"Your divorced women wished to ruin my wife, whose virtue they envy," said Antistius Verus, also alarmed.

Other Augustians spoke of Chilo. They wondered what had happened to him. He could have lived in peace, enjoy a fine wine cellar, and have a monument erected to him after death. All at once he lost everything. He must have gone mad.

"He has not gone mad, but became a Christian," said Tigellinus.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Vitellius.

"Have I not told you so?" put in Vestinius. "Torture them, if ye like, but do not enter into a struggle with their divinity. Ye must not jest with it! I have not burned Rome, but if Cæsar permitted I would forthwith give a hecatomb to their divinity. And all should do the same, for I repeat: It must not be trifled with! Remember that I told you that."

"And I said something else," said Petronius. "Tigellinus laughed when I said that they are defending themselves, but I say more,—they are conquering."

"How? How is that?" inquired several voices.

"By Pollux! If such a man as Chilo could not resist them, who can? If ye think that after every spectacle their number does not grow, then your knowledge of Rome is on a level with that of a copper-smith or a barber. But even they know better what the people think, and what is happening in the city."

"He speaks pure truth, by the sacred peplus of Diana!" exclaimed Vestinius.

Barcus turned to Petronius,—

"What is thy conclusion?"

"I conclude with what ye began: Enough of bloodshed!"

The conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Caesar, who took a seat beside Pythagoras. Little attention was paid to the drama, Chilo occupying the minds of the audience. The people habituated to the sight of torture and death, were bored; they whistled, loudly berated Caesar and his courtiers, and demanded the bear scene. But for the hope of seeing the condemned, and receiving gifts, the spectacle would not have held the audience.

The moment finally came. A wooden cross was brought in, so low that a bear standing on his hind feet could reach the breast of the martyr; then Chilo was brought, or rather dragged in, for the old man, with his broken bones could not walk alone. He was stretched and nailed to the cross so quickly that the Augustians could see his face only after the cross had been fixed in a hole previously prepared, and then all eyes were turned on him. But no one could recognize in that naked man the former Chilo. After the tortures he grew so weak that his face was bloodless, and only on his beard was seen a bloody streak left there when his tongue was torn out. His bones could be seen through his transparent skin. He looked much older, but his eyes, which formerly were ever rancorous, were now mild, and his face as calm as that of a sleeping child. No one in the crowd laughed; the crucified looked so calm, so old, defenceless and weak, by his humility called forth so much pity, that every spectator involuntarily asked himself, why should dying men be tortured and nailed to the cross? Among the Augustians, Vestinius, leaning over to the right and left, whispered in a frightened voice,—“See how they die!” Others were looking for the bear, and all were anxious to see the end of the spectacle.

At last the bear came into the arena, and swaying his head, looked around from under his forehead, as if thinking of something or seeking something. He saw the cross at last, raised himself on his hind feet, then sat down under the cross and began to growl, as if pity awakened in the heart of the brute for that remnant of man.

The Circus slaves urged on the beast, but the crowd kept

silent. Meanwhile Chilo slowly raised his head and looked around him. All at once his face became bright with a smile, his forehead radiant; he lifted up his eyes, and two tears rolled down his face.

And he died.

At that moment a man's loud voice under the velarium exclaimed,—

“Eternal peace to the martyrs!”

Deep silence reigned in the amphitheatre.

CHAPTER XIX.

THERE were but few persons in the prisons after the spectacle in Cæsar's gardens. Those suspected of the Christian superstition were still imprisoned, but barely enough were brought in to serve for coming exhibitions, soon to be given. The people had had enough blood; they were wearied, and showed themselves alarmed at the marvelous conduct of the condemned. Superstitious fears took possession of thousands of the people; wonderful tales were circulated as to the vengefulness of the God of the Christians. Prison typhus had spread throughout the city, and added to the general dread. Funerals were to be seen everywhere, and the story that fresh piacula were necessary to appease the unknown god traveled from ear to ear. Offerings were made to Jove and Libitina. Still, notwithstanding every effort on the part of Tigellinus and his assistants, the opinion that Cæsar had commanded the burning of Rome, and that the Christians were innocent, continued to spread.

This only served to make Nero and Tigellinus more determined in their persecution of the Christians. Fresh orders were given to distribute wheat, wine and olives, in order to calm the multitude; new rules published to facilitate the erection of houses, and as to the materials used in their construction so as to lessen the danger of fires in future. Cæsar even put in an appearance at the sessions of the Senate, and took counsel with the “fathers” on the welfare of the people and the city. The condemned, however, received not the smallest favor. That such punishments should not fall on any but the guilty seemed to be Cæsar's object to fix in the minds of the people. Not a voice was raised in the Senate in behalf of the Christians.

No one wanted to give offense to Cæsar, while those who looked farther into the future saw a menace in the new faith to the very foundations of Roman rule.

The dead and dying were given up to their relatives, since the Roman law respected the dead.

Vinicius derived a certain consolation from the thought that if Lygia died her body would rest in his family tomb, and he himself repose beside her. He entertained no hope of her rescue at that time, and being now wholly absorbed in Christ, and half-separated from the things of this world, he only looked for an eternal union. His faith was boundless, while the life he had lived until now seemed to him as nothing, when he thought of the truth and reality of eternal life. His heart was filled with enthusiasm, while his whole being had changed till it seemed he had altogether lost the grossness of earth, and become a thing almost immaterial. He implored Christ to save Lygia from the torments of the Circus, and allow her to fall calmly into the sleep of death in the prison, feeling certain that he would die himself at the same time. He dared not hope that she alone would escape death. Even Peter and Paul expected to die as martyrs. Chilo had shown him that even a martyr's death could be peaceful. This made him wish it for Lygia and himself.

There were times when he had a foretaste of the future life. His former sadness of soul, with its accompanying bitterness, was gradually giving way to a calm resignation to the will of God. He no longer struggled against fate, but yielded himself calmly to the course of events, believing that calm, and rest, and peace awaited the final end. He felt, moreover, that Lygia, like himself, was preparing for death, and that they were advancing together toward the end. This thought brought him happiness, causing him to smile.

Lygia was also without desire or hope save in the hope of a future life. Death would not only be a liberation to her, and an escape from the hands of Cæsar and Tigellinus, but it would also mark the hour of her marriage to Vinicius. Her happiness would be assured after death for which she now waited as a bride awaits her wedding day.

Like thousands of those first confessors Ursus was carried along by an irresistible current of faith. Though not resigned in his heart to Lygia's death, he did not dare entreat Christ to avert even from her what now seemed to

him the common and inevitable lot of all Christians, and at the same time the certain assurance of their future happiness. In the simplicity of his untutored soul he also thought that Lygia would share more of those heavenly delights than a multitude of simple ones like himself, since she was the daughter of a Lygian king. She could not be the same as an ordinary slave, even in the sight of God, before whom, he had heard, all men were equal. He implored Christ that He might let him serve her always. He wanted to die on a cross as the "Lamb" died. But so great seemed to him this happiness that he dared not pray for its fulfilment. Still it was his one secret wish. His one sorrow was that he should be condemned to die under the teeth of wild beasts. He had lived from his childhood up in impassable forests, bred to the chase, wherein, owing to his wonderful strength, he had become famous among his people, even before he had attained his manhood. The occupation of hunting had become so agreeable to him that when he visited as he sometimes had done, the vivaria and Roman amphitheatres, the very sight of the wild beasts aroused within him an irresistible impulse to engage in struggle with them, even to killing them. This feeling gave rise to a fear in his soul that if placed in such a situation he could not bring himself to die piously and patiently as became a Christian. But in this he placed his trust in Christ, and found a distraction from his fears in other and more agreeable thoughts. He prayed for entire days, performed kindly offices to prisoners, helped overseers, and consoled his queen who mourned at times because she had not been able to perform as many good deeds as the renowned Tabitha of whom Peter had spoken to her. Even the guards of the prison, who feared the giant strength of Ursus, came at last to love him for his mildness. His cheerful temper amazed them. They would often question him as to the cause of it. He spoke with such assurance of the life that comes after death that they listened in astonishment, recognizing for the first time that happiness could find its way into a dungeon that sunlight could not penetrate. He urged them to believe in the "Lamb," and to more than one the thought occurred that the service he performed himself was that of a slave, and that his own life was that of an unfortunate. This set him thinking on the hardness of his lot, which had no other end after all than death.

The thought of death, however, engendered new fear,

without giving promise of aught beyond; but that giant, and this frail maiden, like a flower cast amid the refuse of the prison, went to meet it with delight, as though entering the gates that led to happiness.

CHAPTER XX.

A SENATOR, named Scevinus, visited Petronius one evening, and opened a long discussion. He alluded to Cæsar, and the evil times, through which they were now passing. The very openness of his friend's speech caused Petronius to observe great caution. Scevinus remarked upon the injustice and wickedness, under which they struggled, and predicted that it would result in worse calamity even than the burning of Rome. The Augustians, even, he said, were becoming tired; Fenius Rufus, who was second prefect of the pretorians, was hardly able to endure the wicked orders issued by Tigellinus; the relatives of Seneca were being made desperate by Nero's behavior both toward Seneca and Lucan; and even the people, and the pretorians were dissatisfied. He went so far as to hint, that a great number of these latter had been won over to the side of Fenius Rufus.

"And why dost thou tell me this?" asked Petronius.

"Because of concern for Cæsar," replied Scevinus. "Among the pretorians is a kinsman of mine, who is also named Scevinus; he keeps me informed of what happens in the camp; much discontent is felt there. Thou knowest that Caligula also was mad; and what followed? Cassius Chærea came. That was a fearful thing to do, and surely none amongst us would call it praiseworthy, but Chærea rid the world of a fiend."

"Is this what thou dost mean,—'I wish not to praise Chærea, but he was an excellent man, and I would the gods would send us many such'?" Petronius asked.

But Scevinus turned the conversation. He spoke of Piso, praised him, his family, his loftiness of character, his many virtues and the marvelous power he possessed of gaining adherents.

"Cæsar has no child," he continued; "and all look to Piso to succeed him. Beyond a doubt every one would assist him most heartily. He is loved by all; Fenius Rufus,

and all the kinsmen of Annæus. Plautius Lateranus and Tullius Senecio would go through fire to serve him, and so would Natalis, Subrius Flavius and Sulpicius Asper, and Afranius Quinetianus, and Vestinius himself."

"Piso will not benefit much by this last," said Petronius, "for Vestinius fears his own shadow."

"He believes in dreams and in spirits," replied Scevinus; "but withal he is very practical, and the people would like to see him made consul. At heart, he hates this persecution of the Christians, and so, should have thy support since that touches thee also."

"Not me, but Vinicius," Petronius answered. "For the sake of Vinicius, I wish to save a particular maiden; but I am unable, for I have lost favor with Cæsar."

"How so? Seest thou not that Nero turns to thee, and talks with thee again. And for this reason. He has commenced preparations for Achæa again. He will there sing his compositions in Greek. He desires most ardently to go, but at the same time he is afraid of the cynical wit of the Greeks. He thinks he will achieve either the greatest triumph, or meet with the greatest failure there. He wants advice, and knows that only thou canst give it. For that reason thou wilt return to favor."

"But Lucan could take my place."

"He detests Lucan, and in his heart has determined on the poet's death. He is only waiting for an excuse, for he always seeks some pretext."

"By Castor!" exclaimed Petronius, "that is possible. I know another and a quicker way in which to regain favor."

"What is that?"

"To say to Nero all that thou hast just told me."

"I have said nothing," replied Scevinus in alarm.

"Thou didst call Cæsar mad, thou hast named Piso as his successor, and didst say 'Lucan knows that it is necessary to hasten.' What is it that thou wouldst hasten, carissime?" said Petronius, as he placed his hand upon his friend's shoulder. They looked steadily into each other's eyes for the space of one second, and Scevinus became pale.

"Thou wilt not repeat!"

"No; by the hips of Kypriis, I will not. Thou knowest me it seems. I know of nothing thou hast said. I wish to know nothing. Dost thou comprehend? Life is not long enough for any undertaking to be worth the trouble it

costs. I pray thee, however, to call upon Tigellinus to-day, and engage him in conversation on whatever subject may please thee, as long a time as thou hast spent with me."

"Why so?"

"Because if Tigellinus should ever say 'Scevinus was with thee,' I could reply, 'He visited thee also, on the same day.'"

Scevinus, on hearing this, snapped the ivory cane which he carried, saying,

"May the evil alight on this. I shall visit Tigellinus this very day, and I shall also go to Nerva's feast. Wilt thou be there? At all events, farewell, until the day after to-morrow, when we shall meet in the amphitheatre to see the last of the Christians. Till we meet!"

"After to-morrow," said Petronius to himself, when Scevinus had left him. "We have no time to spare. I can count upon Ahenobarbus, because he really requires me in Achæa." He determined therefore to make a final effort. In truth, Cæsar himself requested that Petronius be placed opposite to him at Nerva's feast so that he might consult with him about Achæa and the other cities where he hoped to appear with great success. He was afraid of the Athenians, hence was most anxious to please them. The Augustians listened carefully, to gather such shreds of the conversation as they could make use of afterward, as their own opinions.

"I feel as though I had not lived until now," Nero remarked, "that I shall commence life anew in Greece."

"It will be a new birth to greater glory, and more immortal fame," answered Petronius.

"I trust it will be so, and that I may not incur the jealousy of Apollo. If I come back triumphant, I will offer to him such a hecatomb, as never God had before."

Scevinus here commenced to quote from Horace,

"Sic te diva potens Cypri,
Sic fratres Helenæ, lucida sidera,
Ventorumque regat Pater"—

"The vessel is waiting us at Naples," said Cæsar. "I should be glad to go to-morrow even."

Thereupon Petronius arose, and looking steadfastly at Nero, remarked,

"Permit me, O divinity, to give a marriage feast and to invite thee to it before all others."

"A marriage feast! Whose marriage feast?" asked Nero.

"That of Vinicius, with the daughter of the Lygian king, and who is thy hostage. It is true, that just now, she is in prison, but being a hostage that is against the law. Moreover, thou thyself didst give her to Vinicius, and thy commands like those of Zeus remain unchanged. Therefore thou wilt order her to be freed, and permit me to restore her to thy favorite."

Petronius spoke with such coolness and self-possession, that Nero became uneasy, as he usually did at such times.

"I know," said Cæsar with downcast eyes. "I remember her and that giant also, by whom Croton was killed."

"Therefore," said Petronius, "both are saved."

Here Tigellinus came to his master's assistance.

"She is imprisoned by command of Cæsar, O Petronius, and as thou hast rightly said, his sentences are unalterable."

The interest of all present was now drawn to the conversation. The history of Lygia and Vinicius was well known, and all were curious to know how this passage of words would end.

"She is imprisoned against Cæsar's wish, owing to thy mistake and ignorance of the law of nations," Petronius answered emphatically. "With all thy naïvete, Tigellinus, thou wilt hardly assert that it was she set fire to Rome, and if thou didst Cæsar would not believe thee."

Nero had recovered his self-possession by this time, and looking at Petronius through his half-closed eyes with an expression of the greatest malignity on his features, he said,

"Petronius is right."

Tigellinus gazed in wonder.

"Petronius is right," he repeated. "The gates of the prison shall be open to her to-morrow, and the next day at the amphitheatre we will discuss the wedding feast."

"I have lost again," Petronius said to himself. He was so convinced that Lygia's life would be forfeited, that on reaching his home, he despatched a trusty freedman to the amphitheatre, to arrange with the chief of the spoliarium for her body, so that he might give it to Vinicius.

CHAPTER XXI.

EVENING exhibitions, rare up to the time of Nero, became common during his reign. The Augustians liked them, because they were followed by feasts which lasted till morning. Though the people were tired of bloodshed and tortures, when the news went around that the exhibition was to be the last, and that the remaining Christians were to die then, the amphitheatre was crowded to its uttermost capacity. Not one Augustian was absent; they expected something unusual, and thought that Cæsar would make a tragedy of Vinicius's grief. The kind of torture prepared for the bride of the young tribune was kept secret by Tigellinus, and thereby roused even greater curiosity. Those who saw Lygia in the house of Aulus, were now telling wonders of her beauty. Others wondered if they would really see her in the arena, since Cæsar's answer to Petronius at Nerva's was equivocal. Some thought that he would give her to Vinicius, or, perhaps, had already given her to him. They remembered that she was a hostage, who by the law of nations, had the right to worship whatever divinities she liked.

Uncertainty, expectation and curiosity dominated the spectators. Nero came earlier than usual. It was whispered that something very uncommon would surely happen, for, besides Tigellinus and Vatinius, he came also with Cassius, a centurion of gigantic proportions and strength, whom Cæsar summoned only when he wished to have a defender by his side, as when, at night, he was seeking adventures. It was noticed that in the amphitheatre itself extraordinary precautions were taken. The pretorian guards were increased, and they were commanded not by a centurion, but by a tribune Subrius Flavius, known for his blind devotion to Cæsar. They all understood that Cæsar was at all events preparing to defend himself against a possible attack by Vinicius, and the curiosity grew more intense.

All eyes were turned toward the unfortunate suitor. Vinicius, pale, with cold perspiration on his brow, was just as uncertain as the others, and was alarmed to the depth

of his soul. Petronius, not knowing what was to come, on his return from Nerva, asked him if he was ready for whatever might happen, and if he would come to the spectacle. Vinicius answered affirmatively, but a shudder passed through his entire body, for he knew that Petronius's questions were not without purpose. He had long since been reconciled to death, but to think of departure from this life to eternal rest is one thing, and to witness the torture of a being dearer to him than life itself, is quite another thing. The suppressed despair again took possession of him, and he was seized with a desire to rescue Lygia at any cost. In the morning he wished to go to the cunicula to convince himself that Lygia was there, but the pretorian guards had strict orders to let no one pass, so that even those who knew Vinicius could not be bribed by either prayers or gold. At one time it seemed to him that he would not live to see the spectacle; then again a faint hope throbbed in his heart that Lygia was not in the amphitheatre, and to this hope he clung with all his might. He said to himself that Christ could not permit her to be tortured in the Circus. He resigned himself formerly to His will; but now, when repulsed from the door of the cunicula, he returned to his place in the amphitheatre, and from the curious glances turned on him he understood that there is a foundation for the most dreadful suppositions. He began to implore Christ for help with a passionateness almost approaching a threat. "Thou canst!" he repeated, convulsively clenching his fists, "Thou canst!" Before the moment arrived he had not thought that it would be so terrible; but now he became conscious that if he were to see the torture of Lygia, his love would turn to hate, and his faith to despair. This consciousness appalled him, for he feared to offend Christ, whom he was imploring for mercy and miracles. He no longer prayed for her rescue, but only that she should die before they brought her to the arena, and from the bottomless abyss of his grief he repeated, "O Lord! do not refuse me this, and I will love Thee more than hitherto." His thoughts raged like a sea lashed by a storm. A thirst for blood and revenge was roused in him; he was seized by a mad desire to throw himself upon Nero and strangle him before all the spectators, and at the same time he felt that this desire was an offense against Christ, and a breach of His command. Thus swayed by contrary thoughts and emotions, Vinicius grasped at the thought that faith of itself could save her, as a man

falling over a precipice grasps at everything which grows at the edge of it. That one thing remained. Had not Peter said that faith could move the earth from its foundations? And Vinicius suppressed his doubts, and concentrated his whole being in the one word—faith, and waited for a miracle.

But as an overdrawn cord may break, so emotional over-exertion broke him. His face became deathly pale, and his body cold. He thought that his prayers had been heard, and that he was dying. It seemed to him that Lygia must surely have died, and that Christ is taking them to Himself. The arena, the white togas of the countless spectators, the light of a thousand lamps, all suddenly vanished from his vision.

"Thou art ill," Petronius said to him; "give command to bear thee home."

And without regard to what Cæsar would say, he rose to support Vinicius and escort him home. His heart was full of pity, and, moreover, he was irritated because Cæsar was looking through the emerald at Vinicius, observing his grief with satisfaction, perhaps to describe it afterward, in pathetic strophes, and win the applause of his hearers.

Vinicius shook his head. He might die here, but he could not go out.

The prefect of the city waved a red handkerchief, the gate opposite Cæsar's podium opened, and out of its dark jaws came Ursus into the brightly lighted arena.

Blinded by the light of the arena, the giant blinked, then he walked to the centre and looked around, as if to see what he had to meet. He was known to the Augustians and to most of the spectators as the man who had killed Croton; hence at his appearance a murmur passed along the benches. While there was no lack of gladiators in Rome, remarkable for their strength and bodily proportions, a giant like Ursus had never been seen in Rome. Cassius, who stood beside Cæsar, seemed a small man in comparison. Senators, vestals, Cæsar, the Augustians, and the people looked with the delight of experts at his mighty limbs, the breast, which was like two shields joined together, his herculean arms. The noise grew. The crowd could have no greater pleasure than to see these muscles in action, strained for a struggle. Ursus stood in the middle of the arena like a marble colossus, with sad face, and, seeing the empty arena, looked inquiringly now at Cæsar, now at the spectators, now at

the grating of the cunicula, whence, he thought, the executioners would come.

When he first stepped into the arena, his simple soul was beating with the hope that perhaps a cross was waiting for him, but seeing neither cross nor freshly-dug hole, he thought that he was unworthy of such favor—that he would have to die by the tusks of wild beasts. He was resigned, and had determined to die as became a worshipper of the Lamb, peacefully and patiently. He wished to pray once more to the Saviour, and, kneeling, he raised his eyes to the stars.

The crowd did not like that pose. They have seen enough Christians dying like sheep. They understood that if the giant refused to resist, the spectacle would be a failure. Some of the crowd began to hiss.

Suddenly piercing sounds of trumpets were heard, the grating of the cunicula was thrown open, and an enormous German aurochs, with the body of a naked woman fastened to his back, rushed into the arena, amid the shouts of the bestiari.

“Lygia! Lygia!” cried Vinicius.

He did not even feel that Petronius at that moment covered his head and face with his toga. He thought that death or grief is darkening his vision. He was incapable of thinking; only his lips unconsciously repeated,—

“I believe! I believe! I believe!”

The amphitheatre grew silent. The Augustians, like one man, rose from their seats, for on the arena something unusual was transpiring. The meek and resigned Lygian, seeing his queen on the horns of a wild beast sprang up as if touched by a red-hot iron, and, bending forward, he rushed at the raging animal.

A cry of amazement came from the breasts of the spectators, but immediately subsided into a deep silence. In the twinkling of an eye the Lygian caught up with the plunging bull and seized him by the horns.

“Look!” cried Petronius, and removed the toga from the head of Vinicius.

Vinicius rose, and, throwing back his head, fixed his glassy and vacant stare on the arena. The people held their breath. Nothing like it was ever seen in Rome.

The Lygian held the beast by the horns. The man's feet sank in the sand to his ankles, his back was bent like a drawn bow, his head sank into his shoulders, his muscles

stood out almost bursting the skin, but he held down the bull. They remained as motionless as a marble group. But in this repose there was seen a terrible strain of two struggling forces. The beast as well as the man was in the sand to his knees, and his dark, shaggy body was drawn into a ball. Whose strength would first give out, who would first succumb,—that was the question that entirely occupied the spectators. The Lygian was now a demi-god worthy of adoration. Cæsar himself rose from his seat. He with Tigellinus, hearing of the strength of the man, had arranged this spectacle purposely, saying to each other with a jeer, "Let the conqueror of Croton overcome the bull which we choose for him;" and now they looked with amazement at that picture. Some in the amphitheatre, who had raised their hands, remained in that posture; beads of perspiration stood on the brows of others, as if they themselves were struggling with the beast. Only the crackling of the fire in the torches, and the falling of the cinders was heard in the Circus. It seemed to all that the struggle was lasting for ages.

A dull roar resembling a groan was heard all over the arena, followed by a cry from the spectators, and again there was silence. The spectators thought they were in a dream; the enormous head of the bull began to turn in the iron hands of the barbarian.

The Lygian's face, neck and hands turned purple, his back bent still more. It was apparent that he was rallying the remnant of his superhuman strength, but that they would not last long. More and more the dull, hoarse and painful roar of the bull mingled with the whistling breath of the giant. The head of the beast kept turning, and from his jaws hung a long, foaming tongue. In another minute the crack of breaking bones was heard, and the bull fell to the ground with a broken neck. Quickly the giant removed the ropes from the horns of the bull, and raising the girl, began to breathe hurriedly. His face was pale, his hair stuck together from sweat, and the water was streaming from his shoulders and arms. He stood unconscious for a moment, then raised his eyes and threw a glance around the amphitheatre.

The crowd had gone wild. The walls of the amphitheatre were shaking from the roar of tens of thousands of men. No such enthusiasm was seen since the beginning of the spectacles. People from the higher rows clambered

down to get a close view of the giant. Everywhere were heard cries of mercy, passionate, stubborn, which soon turned into one unbroken chorus. That giant was now dear to the people who worship physical strength; he was the first personage in Rome.

Ursus understood that the people were clamoring for his liberty, but he was apparently unsatisfied. He looked around for a moment, then approached Cæsar's podium, and, holding out the body of the maiden, raised his imploring eyes, as if to say,—

"Have mercy on her! Save her! It was for her sake that I did that!"

At sight of the fainting girl, who in comparison with the gigantic Lygian seemed a little child, the crowd, knights, and senators became equally agitated. Her little figure, as white as alabaster, her unconsciousness, the danger from which she had been saved by the Lygian, and finally her beauty, stirred every heart. Voices choked with tears began to implore for mercy for both.

Meanwhile Ursus walked around the amphitheatre holding out the child as if begging that her life might be saved. Vinicius sprung from his seat, jumped over the barrier into the arena, ran toward the giant, and threw his toga over the naked body of the girl. Then he tore the tunic from his breast, disclosed the scars he received in battle in Armenia, and stretched out his hands to the people.

At this the enthusiasm of the crowd burst all bounds. The crowd stamped and grew wild. The voices, calling for mercy, began to threaten. The people not only took the part of the athlete, but rose in defense of the girl, the soldier, and their love. Thousands of spectators turned to Cæsar with flashes of anger in their eyes, and with clenched fists. But Nero hesitated. It is true, he felt no hatred for Vinicius, and did not desire the death of Lygia, but he would rather see the girl gored by the horns of the bull, or torn to shreds by his teeth. His cruelty, his depraved tastes and passions found pleasure in such spectacles. And now the people are bent on depriving him of that pleasure. At that thought his bloated face showed anger. His egotism did not permit him to submit to the will of the crowd, but at the same time, from inborn cowardice, he did not dare to oppose it.

Cæsar looked around to see if the Augustians at least were supporting him, but Petronius had raised his hand in

sign of forgiveness, and even looked into Nero's face challengingly. Vestinius, who feared ghosts, but not man, gave a sign of mercy also. So did Scevinus, Nerva, Tullius Senecio, the famous old general Ostorius Scapula; so did Antistius, and Piso, and Vetus, and Crispinus, and Minucius Thermus, and Pontius Telesinus, and the admired of all men, Thræsea. Seeing his own coterie against him, Cæsar removed the emerald from his eye, and his face assumed an expression of contempt and offense. Then Tigellinus, who would not miss an opportunity to spite Petronius, bent over and said:

"Do not yield, divine Cæsar; the pretorians are with us."

Nero turned to the place where Subrius Flavius held command over the pretorians, and saw something unusual. The stern face of the old tribune was covered with tears, and his hand was raised.

The crowd grew furious. The stamping raised a cloud of dust, and dimmed the amphitheatre. Among the cries were heard: "Ahenobarbus! Matricide! Incendiary!"

Nero was alarmed. The crowd had always held sway in the amphitheatre. His predecessors, especially Caligula, sometimes acted against the will of the people, but it was always followed by disturbance, and sometimes by bloodshed. But Nero was in a different position. First of all, as a comedian and singer, he needed the people's favorable disposition toward him; second, he wished to have them on his side as against the senators and patricians; and last of all, after the burning of Rome, he strove by all means to retain their good will, and turn them against the Christians. He understood that further opposition was simply dangerous. Cæsar again looked at the centurion Scevinus, Subrius Flavius, on the soldiers, and seeing their frowning brows, gave the sign of mercy.

A thunder of applause greeted the sign. From that moment the victims were under their protection,—for from that moment even Cæsar himself would not dare to persecute them.

CHAPTER XXII.

LYGIA was carefully borne by four Bithynians to the house of Petronius. Vinicius and Ursus walked alongside, hastening, in order to hand her over to the Greek physician as soon as possible. They did not converse, for after the recent events they were unable to speak. Vinicius seemed scarcely conscious, as he repeated that Lygia was saved; that imprisonment and a death in the amphitheatre no longer threatened her; that now their troubles were over, and he would take her away, and they should never again separate. Again and again, he looked on her dear face, as she lay in the open litter, seemingly asleep; and he murmured, "It is she, Christ has saved her." He called to mind, that on their way from the spoliarium, a physician whom he did not know had assured him that she still lived, and would recover.

This thought made him so weak from joy that he could hardly walk alone, and leaned on the arm of Ursus for support. Ursus all the time was gazing on the starlit sky praying.

They went along quickly, through streets, on whose new, white buildings the moonlight played. They were empty, except where an occasional crowd, all ivy crowned, danced and sang to the sound of flutes on some portico. It was only as they neared the house that Ursus ceased to pray, and said softly, as though he were afraid to wake Lygia :

"Lord, it was the Saviour rescued her. When I saw her fastened on the horns of the aurochs, it seemed that a voice within me, said, 'Defend her.' It was the voice of the Lamb! The prison took my strength, but He gave it back to me then, and caused the people to take her part. His will be done!"

Vinicius replied,—

"Blessed be His name!"

He was powerless to continue, for he felt a sudden inward weeping, and an overpowering desire to throw himself down to earth, to thank the Saviour for His mercy.

They had now reached the house, where the slaves, who had received word by a special messenger sent on in advance,

thronged out to meet them. The greater part of these were such as had been sent back from Antium by Paul of Tarsus. They were acquainted with the trials of Vinicius, and at sight of these victims rescued from Nero's malice their joy knew no bounds. This was further increased when Theocles, the physician, assured them that Lygia was not seriously injured, and that her health would be restored, when she had got over the effects of the prison fever.

She regained consciousness the same night. She awoke in a beautiful chamber lighted up by Corinthian lamps, and perfumed with nard and verbenæ. She did not know where she was or what was happening. She recollected having been fastened to the horns of the chained aurochs, and as she now saw the face of Vinicius bending over her, she supposed that she was no longer on earth. She thought it only natural that she should be held somewhere between earth and heaven because she was so weak. She felt no pain, however, and so she smiled at Vinicius and tried to ask where they were; but her lips gave out only a faint whisper wherein he caught with difficulty his own name.

"Christ has saved thee, and given thee back to me!"

Again her lips moved, but no intelligible sound issued, and after a moment, her eyelids closed, she breathed a faint sigh, and fell into a deep slumber. This was what the physician had watched for, and which, he said, was the beginning of her recovery.

Vinicius remained on his knees beside her, absorbed in prayer. In the intensity of love which filled his soul, he was entirely unconscious of self. Theocles appeared frequently, and the golden-haired Eunice came many times to the curtain. At last, the cranes in the gardens commenced to call, as heralds of the approaching day. Vinicius was still however at Christ's feet, unconscious of what was taking place around him; his heart one flame of thankfulness, and ecstasy, and though yet of earth, he seemed to be half in heaven.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER Lygia had been freed, Petronius accompanied the other Augustians to the Palatine, in order to avoid irritating Cæsar further. He wished to hear what was said, and to find out if Tigellinus was concocting some other plan to

destroy Lygia. It was true, that herself and Ursus were now under the people's protection, and could not be touched without rousing their fury; still Petronius knew that the hatred of this powerful pretorian prefect was so deadly toward him, that he would endeavor to strike some blow at his nephew, as he was not able to aim a direct blow at Petronius himself.

Nero was vexed and angry, that the exhibition had ended in an altogether different manner to what he had intended. At first he would not even glance at Petronius, until the latter, cool as ever, approached him easily, saying,—

"Knowst thou what has occurred to me, divinity? Write a poem about the maiden, rescued from the horns of the wild beast, at the command of the lord of the earth, and restored to her lover. The Greeks are æsthetic and would be charmed by such a poem."

The suggestion was a pleasing one to Nero, notwithstanding his vexation. It doubly met with his approval; first, it formed a good subject for a poem, and secondly, he would be able to show himself in a generous light as the merciful lord of the earth. He looked at Petronius a moment, and then replied,

"Yes! may be thou art right! But would it look well for me to praise my own generosity?"

"There is no necessity for names. All Rome will understand who it is, and through Rome all the earth will know."

"Dost thou feel certain that the people of Achæa will like it."

"By Pollux! they will," replied Petronius.

He went away well pleased, knowing that Nero would do nothing to spoil the reality of his subject, and in this way he would be able to fasten the hands of Tigellinus. But for all this, he still adhered to his plan of getting Vinicius away from Rome, as soon as Lygia should be sufficiently recovered.

The following day, when he saw Vinicius, he said,—

"Take her to Sicily. As events have turned out, thou art in no danger from Cæsar, but Tigellinus is ready to poison you, not because of his hatred to you both, perhaps, but because of his hatred to me."

Vinicius smiled, saying, "She was on the horns of the aurochs, and still Christ saved her."

"Then offer Him a hecatomb," said Petronius, impatiently; "but do not expect Him to repeat it. Dost thou

remember how Ulysses was received when he came again to ask favorable winds of Eolus? The gods are not fond of repetition."

"When she is strong enough I will take her to Pomponia," said Vinicius.

"And all the more readily perhaps, that Pomponia is sick. I had the news from Antistius, a kinsman of Aulus. Thou wilt be soon forgotten here by people, in the rush of events, and in such times as these, those are happiest who are out of mind. May Fortune be thy winter sun and summer shade!"

He left Vinicius, while he went to inquire of Theocles how Lygia fared.

She was no longer in danger. In the emaciated state she was in on leaving the prison, impure air, or want of care, would have been disastrous to her, but here she was surrounded by every comfort. By permission of Theocles she was carried to the gardens on the third day, and after that spent some hours there daily. Vinicius gathered anemones and the flowers of the iris, to deck her litter, and bring to her mind again the atrium in the house of Aulus. Sitting in the shadow of the trees, hand in hand, they often spoke of their recent fears and sufferings. Lygia said that it was Christ's way of leading Vinicius to Himself and changing his soul through suffering and trial. Vinicius felt the truth of this, and that nothing of the former patrician remained in him, he, whose own desires formerly constituted his law. It seemed to them both, that all these things happened many years ago, and they lived now, in such peace and calm as they had never previously known. They seemed entirely possessed by a new life of immeasurable happiness. No matter what Cæsar might do in Rome, or how he might terrorize the world, they felt safe in a power a hundredfold greater than his; as though they were out of the range of his rage and hatred. One evening, about sunset, they heard the roar of the beasts from the vivaria. Beforetime, these sounds were sufficient to fill the heart of Vinicius with fear, but now both he and Lygia only looked at each other, and lifted their eyes to the sky. Sometimes, Lygia, who still remained very weak and helpless, slept in the quiet garden, and at such times, as he watched her, he thought that she was not the same Lygia he had seen at the house of Aulus. Her imprisonment and the prison fever had somewhat marred her beauty. At the house of Aulus and when he

tried to take her from Miriam's house she was like some beautiful statue or flower; her face and hands had now become thin and transparent; her lips were colorless and her blue eyes faded. Eunice with her golden hair, who brought flowers to her, and covered her feet with costly stuffs, looked like some goddess beside her. Petronius sought vainly for the charms he had previously seen in her, shrugged his shoulders and wondered if all the struggles and agony of Vinicius, were not worthy of something better than this shadow of another world. Vinicius, however, loved her soul, and loved it all the more for past sufferings; and as he watched over her sleeping, he felt as though he watched over the whole world.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NEWS of the miraculous escape of Lygia spread like wildfire among the few remaining Christians. They began to congregate in order to look at her to whom Christ had clearly shown favor. Miriam and Nazarius, with whom Peter was hiding, and Vinicius and Lygia were listening to Ursus, who was relating about the voice he had heard in his soul, and which commanded him to enter into the struggle with the wild beast. All went away consoled with the hope that Christ would not permit the destruction of all His worshippers, before the day of judgment. They found support in that hope, for the persecutions had not ceased.

For a long time Apostle Peter did not venture to appear at the house of Petronius, but when one evening Nazarius announced his arrival, Lygia and Vinicius ran to meet him, fell to his feet, and greeted him with great alarm. Few Christians remained and they feared for his safety. Vinicius insisted on his going with them to Naples, where they would meet Pomponia, and then to Sicily, but the Apostle stoutly resisted the temptation, although he was in danger of being momentarily apprehended. Petronius brought the terrible news that letters were found upon one of Caesar's freedmen from Peter, Paul of Tarsus, Judas, and John. Peter's coming to Rome was known to Tigellinus, but he was supposed to have perished with the other Christians. Now it was determined to uproot and exterminate the remainder of the hated sect by consigning the two leaders to the cross.

Vinicius, when he heard of it, went with Ursus to Miriam's house on the edge of the Trans-Tiber, where he found Peter surrounded by a group of the faithful. Timothy, Paul's assistant, and Linus were also at his side. It appearing unsafe, they all went to the quarry in a waste part of the land. There they tried to persuade the Apostle of the necessity of saving himself by going to Sicily.

With tears in their eyes they surrounded him and entreated in the name of Christ,—

"Hide thyself, teacher, and lead us away from the power of the 'Beast.'"

"Look at our tears!"

Tears came to the eyes of Peter. He rose, stretched his hands over the kneeling Christians, and said:

"May the name of the Lord be blessed, and may His will be done!"

At dawn of the following day, two dark figures were moving along the Appian road toward the ruins of the Campania.

They were Nazarius and Peter, leaving Rome and their co-religionists, who were destined to end their days in torture.

The sun appeared from behind the mountains, and at the same time the Apostle was staggered by a strange vision. It seemed to him that the golden circle, instead of rising, was coming down the mountain and advancing on the road.

Peter stopped and asked:

"Dost thou see the light approaching us?"

"I do not see anything," answered Nazarius.

Peter shaded his eyes with his hand, and after a while said:

"Some one is approaching us in the glare of the sun."

But not the slightest sound was heard. Perfect stillness reigned. He looked at the Apostle, and exclaimed with alarm,—

"Teacher! what ails thee?"

The staff fell from Peter's hand, his eyes looked immovably forward, his lips parted, and wonder, gladness and ecstasy were depicted on his face. Suddenly he fell on his knees, stretched forward his hand, and cried:

"Christ! Christ!"

And he threw himself on the ground, as if to kiss some one's feet.

He was silent for a long time, then were heard the words of the old man, broken by sobs,—

"*Quo vadis, Domine?*"

A sad and gentle voice reached his ears,—

"If thou hast deserted my people, then I am going to Rome to be crucified anew."

The Apostle lay on the ground without motion or speech. Nazarius thought that he had died or fainted, but Peter finally rose, and, taking his staff, turned toward the seven hills of the city.

The boy, seeing this, repeated,—

"*Quo vadis, Domine?*"

"To Rome," answered the Apostle, in a low voice.

Paul, John, Linus, and all the faithful received him with amazement and alarm, for shortly after his departure the pretorians surrounded Miriam's house and searched for the Apostle. But Peter answered all questions with calmness and delight,—

"I have seen the Lord!"

And the same evening he went to the Ostrianum to teach and baptize those who wished to bathe in the water of life.

He daily repeated the pilgrimage, followed by ever-increasing numbers of people. It seemed that every tear of the martyr gave birth to hundreds of followers of Christ, every groan in the arena echoed in thousands of hearts.

Cæsar bathed in blood, Rome and the entire pagan world raged, but those who were sated with blood and madness, those who have been trampled upon, those whose life was one chain of bitterness and oppression,—the abased, the unfortunate, all came to hear the strange tidings of God, who out of love for man, and in order to redeem their sins, had given Himself to be crucified.

And finding a God whom they could love, they found what that world could not give them,—happiness which comes from love.

And Peter understood that neither Cæsar nor all the legions could not overcome the living truth; that neither blood nor tears can drown it, and that now its victory was beginning. He understood why the Lord had turned him back on the road. The city of crime, of pride, of wickedness and unexampled power was beginning to be His city, and the double capital, which was destined to rule the world—its bodies and its souls.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT last the hour had struck for both Apostles; but as if to round up his glorious career, it was given the fisherman of the Lord to catch two souls even in the dungeon. The soldiers, Processus and Martinianus, who were on guard at the Mamertine prison, received baptism. Then came the hour of tortures. The old Apostle was first subjected to the customary stripes, and the following day he was led beyond the city walls, where the punishment of the cross was awaiting him. The soldiers wondered at the crowds that gathered at the prison,—they wondered why anybody should be interested in the death of an ordinary man, and especially a foreigner. The sun had inclined toward Ostia when Peter, surrounded by pretorian guards, appeared at the prison gate. Out of consideration for his age he was not compelled to carry the cross, nor had the fork been placed on his neck. Peter walked freely, and the faithful could see him well. When his white head appeared amid the helmets of the guards there was some sobbing in the crowd, but it immediately ceased, for his face was so bright with joy that they all understood that it was not a victim going to the place of execution, but a victor heading a triumphal procession. And it was so in fact. The fisherman, always humble and stooping, now walked as erect as his guard. There was never such dignity in his figure. Voices were heard: "There is Peter going to the Lord." All seemed to have forgotten he was led to torture and death. They all felt that nothing so great had happened since the death on Golgotha, and that if that death redeemed the world, this was to redeem Rome.

People on the road were amazed at the sight of the old man; and the Christians approached them and said: "See how a just man goes to death,—one who knew Christ, and preached love to the world." The pagans reflected, and departing, said, "Indeed, he cannot be unjust!"

Peter walked along the road amid the silence of the crowd, conscious that he had fulfilled his mission; that the truth he was proclaiming would sweep over the city like a mighty wave, and bury it never to rise again. He raised

his eyes to heaven and said : " Lord, Thou didst command me to conquer the city, which rules the world, and I have conquered it ; Thou hast commanded to found Thy throne in it, and I have founded it."

All around was quiet. The hills were warming themselves and nestling in the sun. The procession finally reached a place between the Circus and the Vatican hill. The soldiers began to dig a hole, and the crowd, quiet and wrapped in attention, knelt all around. The Apostle, with his head illuminated by the golden rays of the sun, turned and took a farewell look at the city. At a distance below streamed the gleaming Tiber ; on the opposite shore was seen the Martius field, the mausoleum of Augusta ; below that, the gigantic baths which Nero was building, then Pompey's theatre, the Septima Julia, porticos, temples, columns, and, finally, further down, the hills, studded with houses,—a gigantic human ant-hill, whose bounds were lost in the blue haze—a nest of crime, but also of power ; of madness, but also of harmony—which had become the head of the world, its oppressor, but at the same time its law,—mighty, invincible, eternal.

Peter, surrounded by soldiers, looked at the city as a ruler looks at his inheritance. And he said to this city, " Thou art redeemed and mine ! " And no one surrounding him knew that before them was the true ruler of that surging life ; that Cæsars would pass away, waves of barbarians go by, and ages succeed each other, but that old man will hold unbroken sway.

The sun had sunk still more toward the Ostia as a great fiery ball. The whole western sky was aglow with immense brightness. The soldiers approached Peter to strip him.

Suddenly he rose to his full length, and raised his right hand. The executioners stopped as if frightened ; the faithful held their breath, thinking that Peter was about to say something.

But Peter, standing on the height, made the sign of the cross, blessing in the hour of death,—

*Urbi et orbi ! **

In that same wonderful evening another detachment of soldiers led Paul along the Ostian road to a place called Aquæ Salvie. He was also followed by a crowd of the faithful whom he had converted. Paul recognized near acquaintances, and stopped to converse with them,—the guard

* The city and the world.

treated him with the respect due a Roman citizen. Beyond the Tergemina Gates he met Plautilla, the daughter of the prefect Flavius Sabinus, and seeing her youthful face covered with tears, said: "Plautilla, daughter of Eternal Salvation, depart in peace. Give me thy veil with which to bind my eyes when I am going to the Lord." And taking it, he went forward with the gladness of a laborer who is returning home after a hard day's labor. His thoughts, like those of Peter, were as calm and clear as that evening sky. He recalled his journeys, his labor, his struggles, from which he came out conqueror, the churches he had founded in all lands and beyond all seas; and he thought that he had earned his rest honestly, that he had finished his work. He knew that the seeds he had sown would not be blown away by the wind of malice. He was retiring from the world with the conviction that in the battle which his truth had declared against the world it would conquer, and peace settled on his soul.

The road to the place of execution was long, and evening was coming. The hilltops assumed a purple tint, and their bases disappeared in a deepening shade. The flocks were returning home. Here and there groups of slaves were walking with tools on their shoulders. Children, playing before the houses, looked with curiosity at the passing soldiers. In that transparent, perfume-laden air there were a peace and harmony which seemed to lift from earth to heaven. Paul felt this, and his heart was filled with delight at the thought that to that harmony of the world there will be added one note which it had not hitherto, and without which the world would be "like sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."

He had taught people love, had told them that though they were to give their property to the poor, though they knew all languages, all secrets, and all sciences, they would be nothing without love,—that kind, enduring love, which does no evil, which does not desire adoration, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

And so his life was passed in teaching this truth. And now he said to himself,—what power can overcome it? How can Cæsar stifle it, though he had twice as many legions, twice as many cities, seas, lands, and nations?

And he went to the place of execution like a conqueror. The procession turned from the main road to the east, in

the direction of the Salvian waters. The centurion stopped the soldiers at the fountain. The moment had come.

Paul threw Plautilla's veil over his shoulders, and again raised his eyes, full of peace, to the purple-hued sky, and prayed. Yes, the moment had come, but he saw before him a broad path, covered with the rays of the evening twilight, leading to heaven, and he repeated in his soul the words he had written in anticipation of the approaching end of his service,—

"I have fought a righteous fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; and now there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

Rome continued its mad career. In the absence of Nero, two of his freedmen, Helius and Polythetes, ruled in his stead. It seemed that the city which had conquered the world, was at last falling to pieces. The day of the Apostles' execution had hardly passed, when Piso's conspiracy came to light; and then there came such merciless reaping of the highest heads in Rome, that even to those who considered Nero a god, he now seemed a god of death. Mourning fell upon the city, terror possessed people's hearts, but the porticos were still adorned with ivy and flowers,—it was not permitted to show sorrow for the dead. People, rising in the morning, asked themselves whose turn would come next. The retinue of gods following Cæsar increased every day.

Piso paid for his conspiracy with his life; he was followed by Seneca, and Lucan, Fenius Rufus, and Plautius Lateranus, Flavius Scevius, and Afranius Quinetianus, and the perverse companion of Cæsar's madness—Tullius Senecio, and Proculus, and Araricus, and Tugurinus, and Gratus, and Silanus, and Proximus, and Subrius Flavius, once devoted to Cæsar with his whole soul, and Sulpicius Asper. Some perished through their own insignificance, some through their fear, some through their wealth, others through their bravery. Cæsar, terrified by the number of the conspirators, surrounded the city walls with soldiers, and held it as if by siege, daily sending out centurions with death sentences to suspected houses. The condemned wrote flattering letters, praising him and thanking him for the sentences, and leaving him a part of their property so as to save the rest for their children. At last it seemed as if

Cæsar purposely exceeded every measure to see to what degree of baseness people would descend, and how long they would endure his bloody rule. After the conspirators, their relatives were executed, then their friends, and even their simple acquaintances. There were incessant funeral corteges. Pompeius, Cornelius Martialis, Flavius Nepos, and Statius Domitius, all were accused and sentenced for a lack of love for Cæsar. Rufius Crispinus was sentenced to *aquæ et ignis interdicto* because he had been the husband of Poppæa. The great Thræsea was ruined by his virtue; many paid with their lives for their noble origin; even Poppæa fell a victim in a moment of Nero's anger.

The Senate lay prostrate before the terrible ruler; it raised temples in his honor, crowned his statues, appointed priests to him as to a divinity.

Meanwhile, below on the fallow-land soaked in blood and tears, the fruit of Peter's sowing came forth rich and multiplying.

CHAPTER XXVI.

VINICIUS TO PETRONIUS:

"WE know, carissime, nearly all that is taking place in Rome, and that which we do not know thy letters tell us. When one throws a stone in the water, the waves extend themselves in an ever growing circle; it is thus the wave of madness and malice has extended itself from the Palatine to us. Carinas, sent hither by Cæsar, has plundered the cities and temples that he might fill the empty treasury. He builds the 'golden house' in Rome at the people's expense. Thou knowest Carinas. Chilo was something like him till he redeemed himself by his death. His men have not yet reached the neighboring towns, perhaps because there are no temples or treasures to be found there. Thou wouldst know whether we are out of danger. We are out of mind; that must suffice for an answer. As I write I can see our serene bay, and Ursus in a boat casting his net in its clear waters. My wife is spinning beside me, while the voices of our slaves are heard singing in the gardens. What calm! what forgetfulness of our former sufferings! But it is not the Parcæ, as thou sayst, who spin out our lives so pleasantly; it is Christ who blesses us, our beloved

God and Saviour. We weep over the misfortunes of others, but there is a consolation in those tears that is unknown to thee, for when our life is ended we shall be again united to those loved ones who died for God's truth. Peter and Paul are not dead to us, but merely born into glory. We see them with the eyes of the soul. Yes, my dear friend, nothing can destroy our happiness, since death, the end of all things with thee, is but the beginning of everlasting life with us.

"Thus passes the time herē. Our servants and slaves are believers in Christ, like ourselves; hence we love one another. Lygia and I often talk of the past which is like a dream to us, and the thought of how near she was to torture and death, makes me extol the Lord with all my soul, since it was He alone who saved her from the arena, and restored her to me forever. Thou hast seen what fortitude, what consolation that religion can give in misfortune, what patience and courage before death; come, then, and see what happiness it can bestow in the ordinary, common day life. Hitherto people had no knowledge of a God who could be loved by man, therefore they loved not one another. From this proceeded their misfortune, for as light issues from the sun, so does happiness come from love. None taught this truth, and it was unknown in Greece or Rome. The teaching of the Stoics tempers the heart as a sword is tempered, but it makes it indifferent, not better. Why write this to one who knows more than I, and whose understanding is superior to mine? More than once hast thou conversed with Paul of Tarsus, therefore thou must know whether what he taught does not show, in comparison, what a vain and empty jingle of words devoid of meaning were all the teachings of the philosophers and rhetors. Thou wilt remember the question he put thee: 'But were Cæsar a Christian, would ye not all feel safer, surer of possessing that ye possess, free from alarm, and certain of tomorrow?' Thou saidst to me that our teaching was an enemy of life. I answer thee by saying that had I written nothing in my letter but the three words, 'I am happy!' I could not have expressed all my happiness to thee. Thou wilt say in answer that my happiness is Lygia. True, because I love her immortal soul, and for the reason that we both love each other in Christ. Such love knows no separation, no deceit, no change, no old age, no death. When youth and beauty pass away, and our bodies decay and die,

love still remains, since the spirit remains. Before my eyes were open to the light I did not love Lygia; it was Christ who first taught me how to love. He alone is the true source of peace and happiness. I do not say this of myself; reality affirms it. Compare thy own luxury, my friend, filled with alarm, thy delights, not certain of the morrow, thy orgies, with the lives of Christians, and thou wilt find a ready answer. But the better to compare, come to our mountains filled with odor of thyme, to our shady olive groves that line our shores. A peace waits thee there, such as thou hast not known for a long time, and hearts that truly love thee. Thou, possessed of a good and noble soul, shouldst be happy there. Thy mind will readily recognize the truth, and knowing it thou wilt love it. To be its enemy, like Cæsar and Tigellinus, is possible, but no one can be indifferent to it. O my Petronius, Lygia and I are consoling ourselves with the hope of seeing thee soon. Be well, be happy, and come to us."

Petronius received this letter at Cumæ where he had gone with other Augustians who were following Cæsar. His long struggle with Tigellinus was nearing its end. He already knew he must fall in that struggle, and he understood the reason. As Cæsar sank lower in his dissipation the exquisite arbiter became but a burden to him. Should Petronius remain silent, Nero regarded his silence as blame; should he praise, he saw only ridicule. The brilliant patrician wounded his self-love, and excited his envy. He coveted his wealth and splendid works of art, a feeling which was likewise shared by his all-powerful minister. Petronius's superior taste, and the knowledge he possessed of everything Greek, wherein he was of use to Cæsar, had saved him thus far, but no sooner had Tigellinus explained to Cæsar that Carinas surpassed him both in taste and knowledge, and could better arrange the Achæan games, receptions, and triumphs, than Petronius felt he was lost. They had not had sufficient courage to send him his sentence while he was in Rome. The great industry and energy he had shown while proconsul in Bithynia, and later as consul in the capital, had shown both Cæsar and Tigellinus that this man was capable of anything, and they well knew that he possessed not only the love of the people at Rome, but also of the pretorians. None could foresee how Petronius might act in a given crisis; it was, therefore, deemed wiser

to entice him away from the city, in order to accomplish their purpose.

It was with this object that he received an invitation to go to Cumæ with other Augustians. He accepted, while suspecting the designs upon him, more perhaps not to appear in open opposition, and to show once more a joyful face to Cæsar and the Augustians, and thus gain a last victory over Tigellinus before his death.

In the meantime Tigellinus accused him of friendship with the Senator Scevinus who was the prime agent in Piso's conspiracy. His people in Rome had been imprisoned, and his house surrounded by pretorian guards. He showed neither alarm nor concern on learning of this, but with a smile said to the Augustians whom he received in his own magnificent villa in Cumæ,—

"Ahenobarbus likes not direct questions; ye will witness his confusion when I ask him whether it was he who ordered the imprisonment of my 'familia' in the Capitol."

He then invited them to a feast "before the longer journey," for which he had made preparations when Vinicius's letter arrived. This letter made Petronius somewhat thoughtful, but after a while he regained his wonted composure, and that same evening answered as follows:

"I rejoice at your happiness and admire your loves, since I had not thought that two lovers could remember a third person who was far distant. I am not only not forgotten by you, but it is your wish to persuade me to go to Sicily in order that ye may share with me your bread and your Christ, who, as thou sayest, has bestowed such happiness upon you.

"If that be so, honor Him. To my thinking, however, Ursus had a share in the saving of Lygia, as had also the Roman people. But since thou believest that Christ alone affected this, I will not contradict thee. Be lavish in thy offerings to Him. Prometheus also sacrificed himself for man; but, alas! while we regard Prometheus as an invention of the poets, people worthy of belief have assured me they saw Christ with their own eyes. I agree with thee that He is the most worthy of all the gods.

"I remember Paul's question, and I think that if Ahenobarbus lived according to the teaching of Christ I might have time to visit you in Sicily. We could then converse under the shade of trees and beside fountains, about the gods and those truths discussed by the Greek philosophers.

"There are only two philosophers I care for: Pyrrho and Anacreon. I hold the rest cheaply, with all the Greek and Roman stoics. Truth, Vinicius, abides at such an elevation from earth that even the gods themselves are unable to discern it from the top of Olympus. Thy Olympus is still higher, and, standing on it, thou callest out to me, 'Come, thou wilt see such sights as thou hast not yet seen!' Perhaps. But I must answer, 'I have not feet for the journey.' If thou peruse this letter to the end thou wilt own, I think, that I am right.

"No, happy husband of the Aurora princess! thy religion cannot be mine. Must I love the Bithynians who bear my letter, the Egyptians who heat my bath? Ahenobarbus and Tigellinus? By the white knees of the Graces! I could not love them, did I wish to. There are thousands of deformed people in Rome. Am I to love them also? And how shall I get the love when it is not in me? If thy God wishes me to love such, and is all powerful, why did He not make them all beautiful as Niobe's children, which thou hast seen on the Palatine? It is impossible to love deformity, when one loves beauty. It is possible to love our gods even though one has no belief in them, as they were loved by Phidias, Lysias and others.

"Even did I desire to follow whither thou wouldst lead me, I could not do so; and as I have no such desire I am doubly unable. As Paul of Tarsus teaches, so thou dost believe that in Elysian fields beyond the Styx thou wilt behold thy Christ. Ask Him then, whether he would permit me to take my gems, my Myrrhene vase, my books and my golden-haired Eunice. The idea amuses me, for Paul of Tarsus said that all luxury must be denied oneself for Christ's sake. True, he promised in return other delights; but I told him I was too old now to change, and that these things were dearer to me than my foul neighbor of the Subura.

"These are some of the reasons why I cannot share thy happiness; but there is one other that I have kept for the last. Thanatos calls me. Thy sun is rising, but mine has already set, and the dusk is enfolding me. I must die, carissime.

"It is useless to speak long of it. It was bound to come to this at last. Knowing Ahenobarbus, thou wilt see why it is so. Tigellinus has won, or I should say I have

reached the end of my victories. I will die as I have lived, as pleases me.

"Be not troubled about this. It is not thy God alone, who teaches man to meet death with calmness. No. Before thou entered into the world, men knew that when the cup was drained, the time for rest had come; and still they know how to go quietly. Plato tell us that virtue is music; if that be so, I have lived virtuously, and shall so die. I would bid farewell to thy divine wife, as I once greeted her in the house of Aulus! 'I have seen many people, but have never met thy equal.'

"If the soul is more than Pyrrho says, mine will visit thee and Lygia as it passes to the ocean; and, in the form of a butterfly, or, according to the Egyptian, as a sparrow hawk descend at your house. If not, I may not come.

"May Sicily be your gardens of Hesperides and may the goddesses strew your paths with flowers, while white doves build on the columns of your house."

CHAPTER XXVII.

PETRONIUS was not mistaken. Two days later young Nerva, always devoted to him, sent his freedman to Cumæ with the news of what was happening at the court of Cæsar.

The death of Petronius had already been determined. A centurion was to be sent to him the following evening with the order to remain in Cumæ, and there await further orders; the next messenger was to bring him the death sentence.

Petronius listened with imperturbable calmness to the freedman, and then said:

"Thou wilt take to thy lord one of my vases, which I will give thee before thy return. Tell him that I thank him with my whole soul, for now I am able to anticipate the sentence."

And he began to laugh, like a man who has come upon a happy thought, and rejoices in advance at its fulfilment.

That same afternoon his slaves bore invitations to all the Augustians living in Cumæ requesting their attendance at a feast at the villa of the arbiter elegantiarum.

Petronius himself wrote something in his library, then took a bath, gave command to arrange his dress, and,

brilliant as a god, he walked into the triclinium, threw an expert glance on the preparations, and descended into the garden, where boys and Grecian maidens were weaving wreaths of roses for the feast. He scattered gifts to his servants that they might surpass themselves, and make it the most magnificent feast ever seen in Rome.

Eunice, who was sent for, came, all in white, with a sprig of myrtle in her hair, as beautiful as Charita. Petronius seated her beside him, and gently touching her cheek, looked at her with the admiration of a critic who is inspecting a work of art.

"Eunice," said he, "dost thou know thou hast been freed this long time?"

She raised her calm, blue eyes, and shook her head.

"I am thy slave always," she said.

"But perhaps thou knowest not," continued Petronius, "that this villa, these slaves, the flocks and gardens are thine from this day."

Eunice asked in an alarmed voice:

"Why dost thou tell me this?"

She looked at him with frightened eyes, and her face was as pale as linen. Petronius smiled, and uttered but one word: "So!"

After an interval of silence, he said:

"Eunice, I wish to die calmly."

"I hear thee, master," she said with a painful smile.

Although no one knew that that was to be the last "symposium," the guests came in crowds, for compared to his feasts, even the feasts of Cæsar seemed dull and barbarous. True, many knew of the impending fate of Petronius, but they did not doubt his ability to get out of the difficulty by a dexterous act or speech, as was his wont.

The table-covers sparkled with splendor,—inoffensive, harmonious. Mirth and freedom spread in the hall with the aroma of violets. The guests, entering this hall, felt free from the oppression, and the threatening surroundings of Cæsar's feasts, where one might pay with his life for an inapt wording of his praise. At the sight of the wine resting on its snow banks, the vases, the lights, and the rare viands, they all became joyous. The conversation started all at once, as does sometimes the buzzing of bees on an apple-tree. The conversation was only interrupted by a burst of laughter, a chorus of praise, or a kiss placed too loudly on some white shoulder.

Wine was spilled in honor of the mortal gods, although faith in them had long since been abandoned by many, but such was the custom. Petronius reclined near Eunice, and conversed with her of the latest divorces, of love affairs, of horse-races, of the now famous gladiator Spiculus. He also spilled some wine, but explained that it was only in honor of the Lady of Cyprus, who is the most ancient of all the gods,—the only immortal, and almighty being. His speech was like the light summer breeze which stirs the flowers in a Roman garden. Greek maidens from Kos danced, and Egyptian soothsayers told the guests their future.

Petronius rose from his Syrian cushion, and said with nonchalance,—

“Pardon me, friends, for asking a favor at a feast. Take each as a gift the goblet from which he first spilled wine in honor of the gods and to my prosperity.”

The goblets were of the most artistic designs, and very costly. Although gifts at banquets were common in Rome, the guests were delighted. Some loudly praised Petronius; others assured him that Jupiter had not given such gifts to the gods on the Olympus; still others were embarrassed by the offer, the gift exceeding common estimate.

Petronius raised aloft the costliest of all goblets, glittering with all the colors of the rainbow, and said:

“This is the one out of which I poured in honor of the Lady of Cyprus. The lips of no man may touch it henceforth, and no hand may ever pour wine from it in honor of any other goddess.”

He threw the goblet on the floor, and it broke into a thousand pieces. And as if in answer to the inquiring glances of the guests, he said:

“Friends, be joyous instead of being surprised! Old age and weakness are sad comrades of declining years. But I will give you an example and a good advice: One may wait for them, but at their approach, it is better to depart, as I do.”

“What dost thou wish to do?” asked a number of voices.

“I wish to make merry, to drink wine, to hear music, to look at the divine forms, which you see around me, and then to die with a crown of flowers on my head. I have taken farewell of Cæsar. Do ye wish to hear my last epistle to him?”

Saying this, he took from beneath the purple cushion a letter, and began to read,—

"O Cæsar, I know that thou art impatiently awaiting my arrival, and that thy heart of a friend is yearning for me day and night. I know that thou wouldst cover me with gifts, make me prefect of the pretorians, and command Tigellinus to be that for which the gods created him, an overseer of mules in those lands which thou hast inherited from Domitia after poisoning her. But pardon me. I swear to thee by Hades, and the shades of thy mother, thy wife, thy brother, and Seneca, that I cannot go to thee. My dear, life is a great treasure, and I managed to take the most precious things from it, but there are many things in life which I can endure no longer. Do not think, I pray, that I am terrified at thy killing of thy mother, thy wife, and thy brother; at thy burning of Rome, and sending to Erebus the best men in thy dominion. No, grandson of Chronos. Death is the inheritance of man; other deeds could not be expected from thee. But to torture one's ears with thy songs, to see thy Domitian belly, on thin legs, especially when it is shaking in a Pyrrhic dance, to hear thy music, thy declamations and poems—suburban poetaster—is a thing beyond my power of endurance, and rouses in me the wish to die. Rome stops its ears when it hears thee; the world ridicules thee. I cannot and will not longer blush for thee. My dearest, the howling of Cerberus, though resembling thy music, will not pain me so much, because I never was his friend, and need not be ashamed of his voice. Farewell, but do not sing; kill, but write no verses; poison, but do not dance; burn, but do not play on a cithara. This is the last friendly counsel of the—*Arbiter Ellegantiarum*."

The guests were terrified. This would be to Cæsar a more cruel blow than the loss of dominion. They knew that the man who wrote that letter must die; and, besides, it was dangerous to listen to such a letter.

But Petronius laughed sincerely and joyously, as if it were a mere joke; then cast a glance all around him, and said,—

"Be joyous, and drive fear from your hearts. No one need boast that he heard this letter. I may boast of it to Charon when crossing the river."

He called the physician, and held out his arm. The experienced Greek tied a golden thread around it, and opened a vein. The blood spurted on the cushion and on Eunice, who said while supporting his head,—

"Master, didst thou think that I would leave thee? If the gods offered me immortality, or Cæsar his dominion, I should still prefer to go with thee."

Petronius raised himself, smiled, and placing his lips to hers, said :

"Come with me."

Eunice also bared her arm to the physician, and her blood began to mingle with Petronius's.

He gave a signal to the leader of the musicians, and again the voices and citharæ were heard. They sang "Harmodius"; then the song of Anacreon resounded in which the poet complained that once upon a time he had found Aphrodite's starving and chilled boy weeping at his door; that he took him into the house, fed him, warmed him, and dried his wings, and he, the ungrateful child, pierced his breast with an arrow; and from that moment peace had deserted him.

Petronius and Eunice, as beautiful as two divinities, listened, smiling, and growing pale. When the song was finished, Petronius commanded to bring more wine, and asked his guests to speak of idle but pleasant things. Finally he ordered the Greek to bind his arm for a moment; he said that he was falling asleep, and that he wished to sleep in the embrace of Hypnos before Thanatos put him to sleep forever.

And he fell asleep; and when he awoke, Eunice's head was lying on his breast like a white flower. He rose, looked at it once more, and had his veins opened again.

At another signal the chorus sang another song of Anacreon, accompanied by the subdued sounds of citharæ. Petronius grew paler and paler, and when the last sounds died away, he turned to the feasters and said,—

"Friends, confess that with us perishes"—

But he had not the strength to finish; his hand, by a last movement, embraced Eunice, his head fell on the cushion, and he died.

The guests, looking at the two forms, which resembled two wonderful statues, understood well that with them perished all that was left to their world,—poetry and beauty.

EPILOGUE.

THE revolt of the Gallic legions under the leadership of Vindex did not seem very serious at first. Cæsar was in his thirty-first year, and there was little hope that the world would free itself from the nightmare which was stifling it. It was remembered that revolts had occurred before among the legions, but they never led to a change of government. Thus, for instance, under Tiberius, Drusus subdued the revolt of the Pannonian legions. "Finally, who could take the place of Nero," people asked, "when all the descendants of the divine Augustus have perished?" Others, looking at the colossal statues representing Cæsar as Hercules, involuntarily thought that no force could break his power. There were also those who, when he left for Achæa, were longing after him, because Helius and Polythetes, whom Cæsar had entrusted with the fate of Rome and Italy, spilled even more blood than he.

No one's life or property was safe. The law ceased to protect. Virtue and human dignity were trampled under foot, family ties were loosened, and the cowardly hearts did not even dare to admit that there was a sign of hope. From Greece came rumors of the unheard-of triumphs of Cæsar, of the thousands of garlands that he received, of the thousands of antagonists whom he had vanquished. The entire world seemed to be one orgy of blood and buffoonery. The idea had taken root that there was an end of virtue and of serious affairs; that the time of dancing, music, depravity, and blood had come. Cæsar, to whom revolt opened the road to new robberies, was not concerned much about the revolt of the legions and Vindex, but rather delighted in them. He did not wish to leave Achæa, and only when Helius reported to him that further delay might cost him his dominion, did he sail for Naples.

When Tigellinus tried to explain to him that the legions, who formerly had no leaders, had at the head of them a descendant of the ancient Aquitanian kings, a famous and skilful general, he answered: "Here the Greeks listen to me; they alone know how to listen; they alone are worthy of my song." His first duty was, he said, art and glory;

but when at last the news came that Vindex had proclaimed him an artist without a scintilla of talent, he sprang from his seat, raged, and moved toward Rome. The wounds caused by Petronius, and healed in Greece, opened again, and Cæsar intended to demand punishment from the Senate for such an unheard-of offense.

His entrance to the city surpassed all former efforts of his. He entered in the same chariot in which Augustus made his triumphal entries. The Senate, knights, and an immense crowd met him with shouts which shook the walls of the city. "Hail, Apollo! Hail, Hercules! Hail the divine, the Pythian, the immortal!" Nero was stirred to the depths of his soul; he was intoxicated with delight. "What was the triumph of Julius Cæsar compared with this triumph?" he asked the Augustians. It seemed that not only Rome, but the entire world had lost its senses.

No one could see the abyss under the mountains of flowers. That same evening the columns and walls of the temples were covered with inscriptions, recounting Nero's crimes, ridiculing him, and threatening him with vengeance. From mouth to mouth went the words: "He sang till he roused the cocks" (*gallos*).^{*} Alarming news spread through the city, terrifying the Augustians. The people, uncertain of the future, dared not express their hopes, but they dared to think and to feel.

The theatre, music, newly invented musical instruments, were still the alpha and omega of Nero's life. He was especially occupied with a new water organ, which was being tried on the Palatine. In his childish mind he imagined that his large projects of spectacles and entertainments would avert the impending danger. It was apparent to all who stood near to him that his acts were feverish. Now he thought of sending the legions to the East; then he prepared to subdue the Gallic legions with song, citharæ, and amazons. The legionaries would surround him with tears in their eyes, and he would sing to them an epinicion. Sometimes he demanded blood; at other times he would express his willingness to give up everything for the government of Egypt to which the soothsayers said he was finally destined, or go to Jerusalem. Then again he was moved by the thought that he, as a wandering minstrel, would earn his daily bread, and the cities and countries would no longer

^{*} A play of words: *galus* means a cock, also a Gaul.

honor him as Cæsar, the ruler of the world, but as an inimitable singer, a poet whose like the world had not seen before.

And thus he threw about, played, sang, changed his plans, turned his life and that of the world into an impossible, phantastic, and at the same time, terrible dream, a noisy spectacle, consisting of bombastic sentences, wretched verses, groans, tears, and blood. Meanwhile the storm in the west was gathering: the comedy was nearing its end.

When news of Galba, and the joining of Spain to the uprising, came to his ears, Nero fell into a rage, broke all the vases, upset the table at a feast, and issued a decree which neither Helius or Tigellinus dared to carry out. To kill all the Gaul residents of Rome, to burn the city a second time, release the wild beasts from the arenaria, and transfer the Capitol to Alexandria, seemed to Nero great, wonderful and easy. But the days of his rule had passed, and even the participators in his former crimes looked upon him as a madman.

The death of Vindex, the dissensions in the legions seemed again to turn the scale to the side of Nero. New feasts were announced, new triumphs and sentences were made public, till a certain night a messenger from the pretorian camps rushed up on a foaming steed, and announced that the soldiers in the city had raised the standard of revolt, and proclaimed Galba Emperor.

Cæsar was asleep at the time, and, rising, he vainly called for the guard which watched at the entrance to his chambers. The court was empty, only the slaves were carrying away what was left by the soldiers. But the sight of Nero frightened them; he wandered alone in the court, calling in alarm and despair. Three freedmen, however, Phaon, Sporus, and Epaphroditus, came to his aid. They wished him to escape, telling him that there was no time to be lost, but he would not part with his delusions. What if he should dress in mourning and speak to the Senate? Could it resist his tears and eloquence? If he should employ all the power of his oratorical art, his artistic skill, could any one resist him? Would they not give him even the prefecture of Egypt?

The freedmen, accustomed to fawn, dared not openly disagree, but warned him that before he could reach the Forum, the crowd would tear him to pieces; and they added that if

he did not mount his horse immediately, they too would leave him.

Phaon offered him refuge in his villa, lying outside the Nomentan gate. They all mounted horses, covered their heads with cloaks, and hurried away. The night was growing pale, and on the streets there was the usual movement of people. The soldiers stood on the streets singly and in groups. Not far from the camps Nero's horse reared at sight of a corpse lying in the road, and the cloak fell from his head. A passing soldier recognizing him, and surprised and confused by the unexpected meeting, gave the military salute. As he passed the pretorian camps he heard shouts in honor of Galba, and understood that the hour of his death was near. He was seized with terror and remorse. He thought that he saw darkness before him in the form of a black cloud, and from that cloud there looked down upon him faces in which he saw his mother, his wife, and his brother. His teeth were chattering from terror, but his clownish soul still found some fascination in the dreadful grandeur of the moment. To be the ruler of the world, and lose all, seemed to him the height of tragedy. And true to himself, he played the principal rôle in this tragedy to the end. He was seized with an unconquerable desire to make some citations, that those present should remember them and preserve them for posterity. Now he said that he wished to die, and called for Spiculus, the best gladiator in the Roman arena; now he declaimed, "Mother, father, and wife call me to death!" In the meantime he was not without hope of escape,—vain, childish hope. He knew that death was coming, and still he did not believe it.

The Nomentan Gate was open. They passed the Ostri-anum, where Peter had taught and baptized, and at dawn they reached the villa of Phaon.

The freedmen no longer concealed from Nero the fact that he must die. He gave command that a grave be dug, and lay on the ground so that a correct measure might be taken. But when the spades were put to the ground, he was seized with terror, his face turned pale, and beads of perspiration stood on his forehead.

In a clownish but trembling voice he declared that the hour had not come yet, then he began to make new citations. He finally asked to be burned. "What an artist is perishing!" he exclaimed in genuine wonder.

Meanwhile Phaon's messenger reported that the Senate

had issued the decree that the "parricide" was to be executed according to ancient custom.

"What is that ancient custom?" asked Nero, who turned as pale as death.

"Thy neck will be fixed between the two prongs of a fork, thou wilt be beaten to death, and thy body thrown into the Tiber," sharply answered Epaphroditus.

Nero threw off his cloak.

"It is time, then!" And looking up, added,—

"What an artist is perishing!"

At that moment the tramping of a horse was heard. It was a centurion coming for the head of Ahenobarbus.

"Make haste!" cried the freedmen.

Nero drew a knife across his throat with a trembling hand, but it was seen that he would never have the courage to cut deep enough to make it fatal. Then Epaphroditus suddenly pushed his hand, and the deed was completed.

"I bring thee life!" said the centurion.

"Too late!" said Nero in a hoarse voice. Then he added:

"Here is faithfulness!"

Death already had him in its grasp. From his neck gushed a stream of dark blood covering the flowers of the garden about his head; his legs kicked convulsively, and he died.

On the morrow the faithful Acte wrapped his body in costly fabrics, and burned it on a pyre steeped in perfumes.

And thus passed Nero, like a whirlwind, a storm, a conflagration, a war or a plague; but the basilica of Peter rules to this day, from the Vatican heights, the city, and the world.

Near the ancient gate of Capena may be seen a little chapel with the half-worn inscription: "*Quo Vadis, Domine?*"

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